NEW

FROM THE MAKERS OF METAL HAMMER

THE STORY OF

GREEN DAY

'SAVIORS' Is the latest album a return to form?

AMERICAN IDIOTS

Enter the minds of Billie Joe Armstrong, Mike Dirnt and Tré Cool

PUNK PIONEERS

How Green Day brought punk rock to the masses with Dookie

EVERY ALBUM EXPLORED

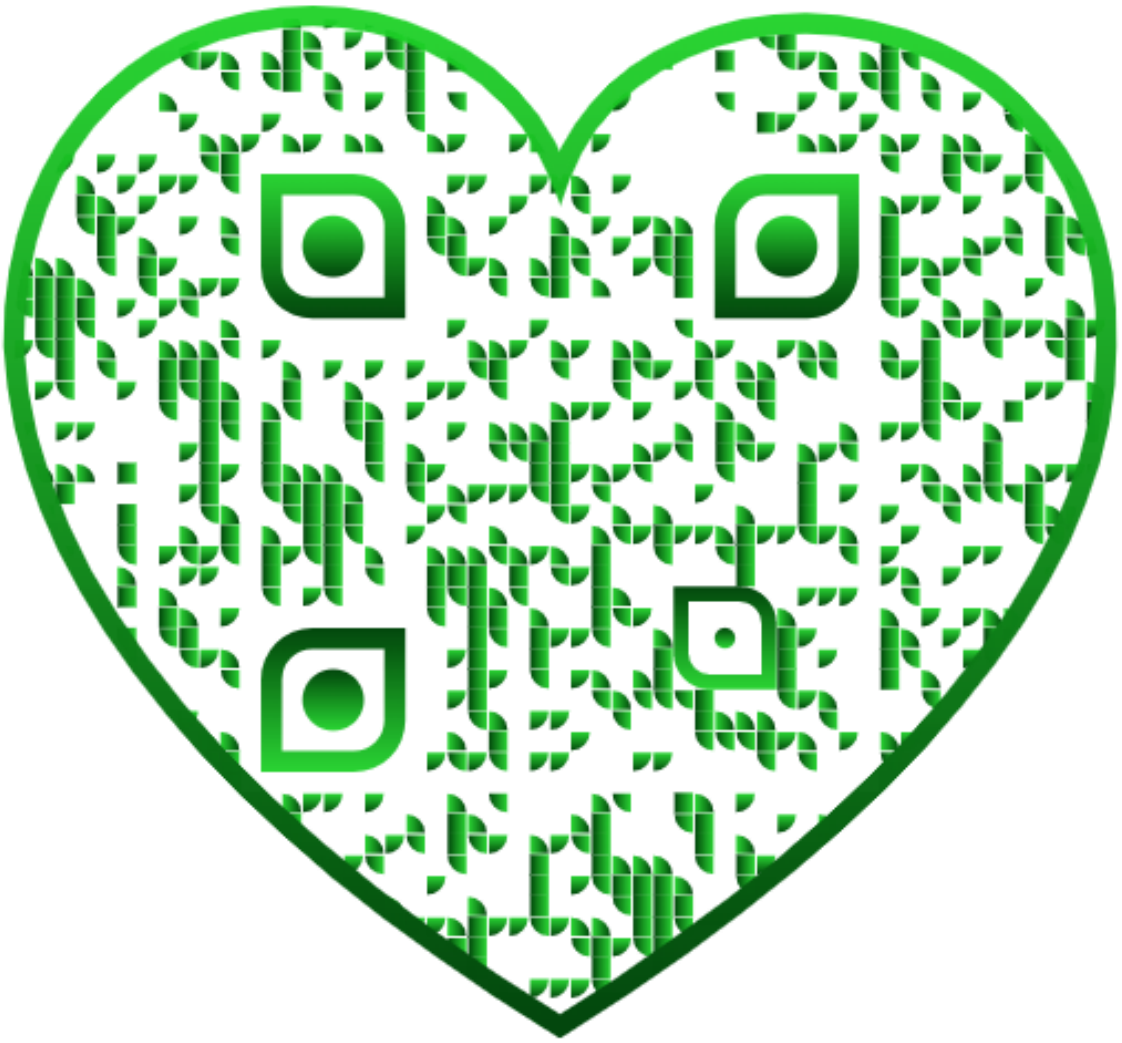
Venture through the entire GD discography

100% UNOFFICIAL

Digital Edition

FUTURE

FIRST EDITION



FOR MORE MAGS

HTTPS://T.ME/IWANTMOREMAGZ

FOR MORE MAGS

HTTPS://T.ME/IWANTMOREMAGZ

Welcome to

THE STORY OF

GREEN DAY

There is no band out there like Green Day.

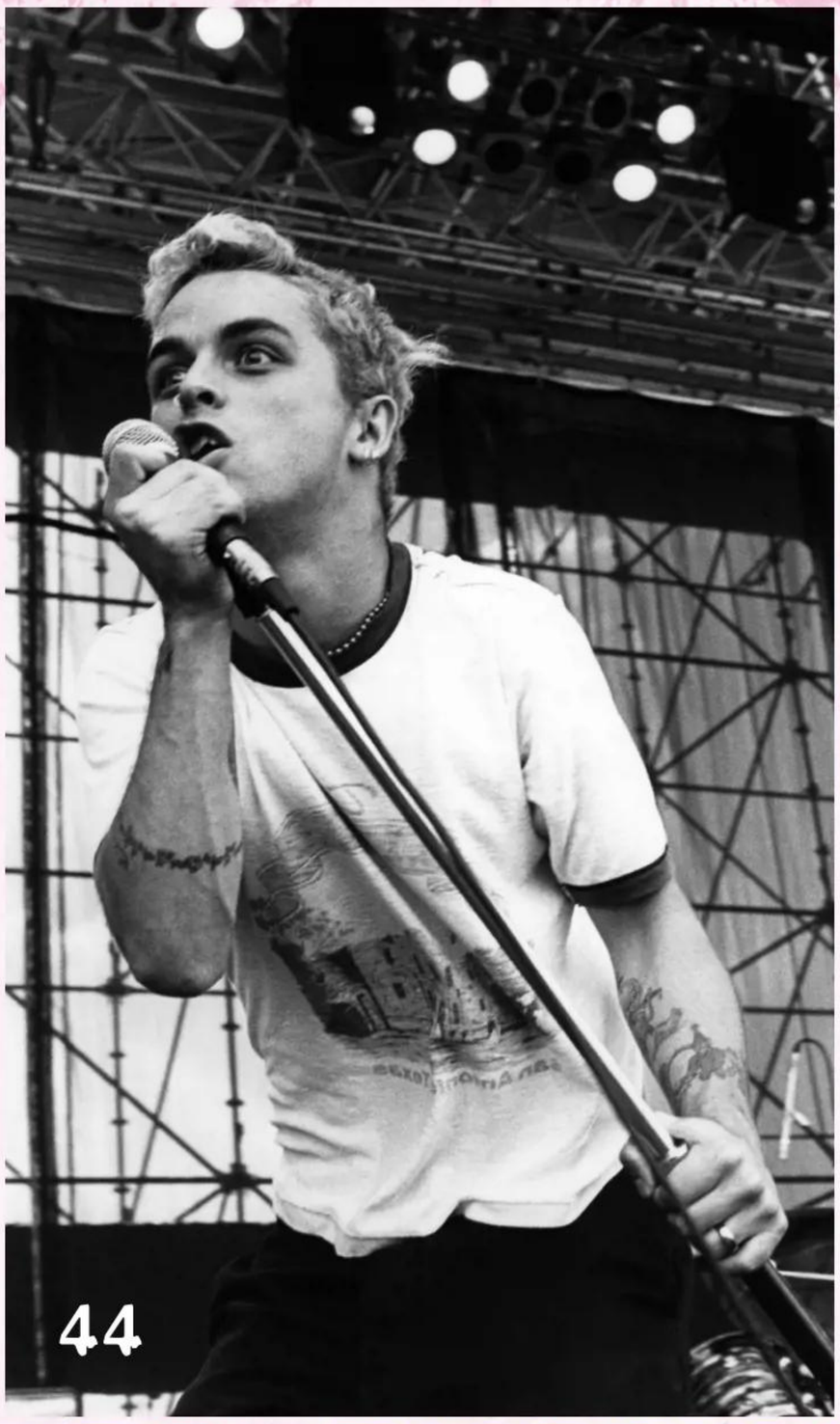
The Berkley trio have been lighting our speakers on fire with their punk-infused metomorphic rock-and-roll for nigh-on 40 years.

Inside, journey through the continued rise of Billie Joe Armstrong, Mike Dirnt and Tré Cool. Explore every album, every high and every low. Witness the trio's climb through the underground scene, their stratospheric popularity spike with *Dookie*, their early 2000s lul and how they achieved one of the biggest rebirths in history with *American Idiot* – and how they continue that momentum today.

Discover more about the men behind the music, too, whether that's Trés love for setting things on fire (watch out!), Mike's sage-like attitude or how Billie Joe's world perspective form's the backbone of Green Day's music. We'll also dive into the wider world of punk rock, answer that tired old question of whether Green Day is true punk and take a moment to look at the bands that followed in their wake.

So, don't be an American Idiot; turn the page and let's get started!

Want to find out what makes Green Day the biggest band on the planet? You've picked up the right bookazine...


44

72

14

CONTENTS

50

26

FEATURES

6 C'mon, Punk, Make Our Green Day
14 Billie-Joe Armstrong: Full-Time Idiot
20 Mike Dirnt: Bass in Your Face
26 Tré Cool: The Basket Case
32 1987-1994: The Early Days
54 1987-1994: From the Margins to the Mainstream
66 The 2000s: The pop-punk Revolution Years
84 The 2010s: Good Times, Bad Times
98 The 2020s: Keep on Keeping On
112 Punk to the Rescue
120 Punk Rock Opera
124 Punk Parents
126 Green DNA

74

CONTENTS

ALBUMS

40 39/Smooth
42 Kerplunk
44 Dookie
58 Insomniac
60 Nimrod
72 Warning
74 American Idiot
80 21st Century Breakdown
90 ¡Uno!, ¡Dos! & ¡Tré!
94 Revolution Radio
104 Father of All Motherfuckers
106 Saviors

SINGLES

50 Basket Case: Freak Out!
62 Good Riddance: Green Day Unplugged

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

C'mon, Punk, make our Green Day!

Words by Scott Rowley

C'mon Punk, Make Our Green Day

So what is punk, and are Green Day it? Here, we try to find an answer

In the 2005 documentary *Punk: Attitude*, former Black Flag frontman Henry Rollins summed up the spirit of punk quite nicely: "All we need is one person to say 'Fuck this!'" he asserted, "and everyone points at them: 'Voice of a generation!

Thank you! I've been thinking that all this time, but I haven't had the courage to say it myself!'"

The film offered the view that punk isn't about the Sex Pistols any more than it's about Green Day – punk, it claimed, is an attitude – which may be as old as the hills, but is still as dangerous as a car bomb. "There's an overemphasis on the 1970s incarnation [of punk]," explained director Don Letts, "and it does the idea a disservice because if you understand that it's a part of an ongoing dynamic, it means it can happen again…"

Don's theory was that punk was an attitude found throughout history: in surrealist painters, in Jerry Lee Lewis jumping on his piano, in Elvis swinging his hips – those culture-shifting 'fuck you' moments. And Don ought to know: he was one of UK punk's original scenesters, and the DJ at The Roxy, the punk hang-out where he introduced the likes of The Clash and the Pistols to the joys of reggae. ▶

Defining exactly what punk is can be a confusing business: the people you think would be proud to be punk often disown it, while some unlikely customers claim kinship. "We were punks," Jon Anderson, singer in prog rock mega-band Yes, told *Classic Rock* magazine. "Punk music was just a collection of ideas. I mean, when Yes were first going, and The Who, we used to break our guitars onstage."

Clash frontman Joe Strummer, meanwhile, tried to distance himself from the movement: "Punk rock still exists," he said in 1981, "but I'm not interested in that… The fans killed it. They wanted it to stay the same, and that ended our interest in it. Now they got what they deserved: a lot of rubbish, basically."

To both men, punk meant – or ought to mean – one thing: unpredictability. Being contrary. Deliberately defying expectations. It was a sentiment echoed in the words of a later countercultural icon. "Punk is musical freedom," Kurt Cobain once said. "It's saying, doing and playing what you want."

The word 'punk' has been in use since Shakespeare's time (back then, as a term for a female sex worker), and was a common term in post-war America. A 'punk' was a lowlife, a thug, a degenerate, or (in prison slang) a submissive who performed sexual acts. And it was someone with ideas above their station – a snotty young know-it-all brat.

When Elvis and the early rock-and-roll guys came along, they were sneered at as punks by the musical establishment whose jobs they threatened. Until then, musicians had to be trained virtuosos – rock-and-roll opened music up to anyone who knew a few chords and could howl a crowd-pleasing anthem. After the beat-group revolution of the 1960s, the legions of ensuing garage bands were called punks – Stones and Yardbirds copyists banging out singles laced with fuzz tones, feedback and trippy lyrics.

Just as the hip-hop acts of the 1980s and 1990s reclaimed racial slur words from the bigots, so snotty young thugs and drug users in the 1970s adopted 'punk' to describe themselves and their music. The MC5, The Stooges and The Velvet Underground broke all the rules: they were anti-establishment, raucous, dangerous, druggy, experimental and primitive. In the early 1970s, the New York Dolls took the Rolling Stones' more ramshackle moments, mixed them with girl-group pop sensibilities and added a sense of glammy theatrics and cutthroat cool.

Captain Sensible of The Damned points to Status Quo as a punk inspiration

The Sex Pistols were at the forefront of the UK punk scene

The Ramones and their punchy two-to-three minute rushdowns left a lasting impact

Patti Smith Group guitarist Lenny Kaye compiled an album of obscure 1960s garage rock – *Nuggets* – that inspired future punks on both sides of the Atlantic. The Ramones decided to strip all blues influences from their music, abolish solos and keep everything to a heady two or three-minute rush. Television, Richard Hell and the Voidoids, the Dead Boys – suddenly New York had a wave of nihilistic, primitive, experimental rock bands that didn't owe anything to the 1970s rock of the time. A couple of scenesters made a magazine to cover the movement. They called it *Punk*.

This being a time before the all-out attack of MTV and a music press desperate to jump on the next big thing, most British folks were unaware of the happenings in New York until some records started trickling over. In the UK, punk was influenced by several other sources. A chancer called Malcolm McLaren returned home to London fresh from a failed period managing the New York Dolls, and full of ideas for a UK version. His clothes shop Sex became a meeting point for like-minded young troublemakers. The jukebox was filled with primitive rock-and-roll, from *Nuggets* staples such as the Count Five and The Seeds to UK oddities such as Screaming Lord Sutch, Vince Taylor and The Troggs, along with shock-rocker Alice Cooper.

A SMILING AND DEFIANT JOHNNY ROTTEN LEAVING COURT AFTER BEING FINED FOR HOLDING ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES

Johnny Rotten auditioned for the Sex Pistols by singing along to Alice Cooper's 'Eighteen' in that very shop. (Early Pistols rehearsals featured 'Johnny B Goode', The Monkees' '(I'm Not Your) Steppin' Stone', The Stooges' 'No Fun' and the Modern Lovers' 'Roadrunner'.)

The Clash's Mick Jones was in the Mott The Hoople fan club; the Sex Pistols' Steve Jones nicked guitars from David Bowie's gig at the Hammersmith Odeon. Meanwhile, another band with a back-to-basics attitude were rocking the UK. "Status Quo," said The Damned's Captain Sensible. "They were the band, the British live band. They were pre-punk punk, if you like: loud and sweaty. They'd sit in the bar before the gig and have a drink with the audience. No star trips."

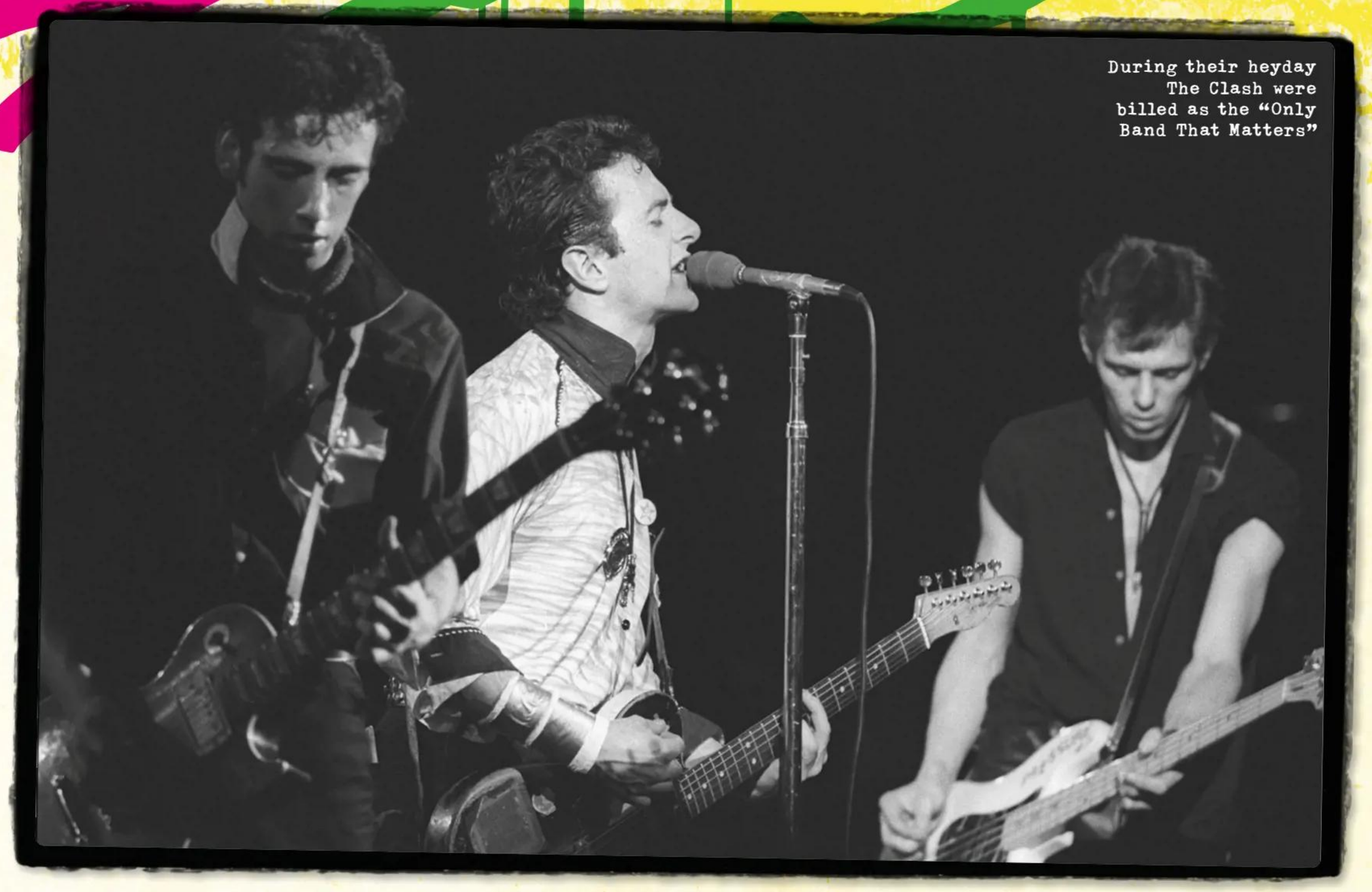
It was time for some new heroes: "No Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones in 1977," sang The Clash. Some of the old guard took it personally, and with good reason: a lot of musicians lost their jobs – technically great players usurped by spotty oiks who couldn't even spell 'arpeggio', let alone play one.

The Clash's lyricism struck a chord with legions of down and outs across Britain and beyond

Punk opened the doors for anyone who knew three chords to go out there give it a go

'PUNK IS SAYING DOING AND PLAYING WHAT YOU WANT'

KURT COBAIN WEIGHED IN ON PUNK'S COUNTERCULTURAL STATUS



During their heyday The Clash were billed as the "Only Band That Matters"

"Punk represents the end of honest rock-and-roll," said Greg Lake of Emerson, Lake and Palmer. "That's what I hate about it." But it wasn't the end of rock-and-roll (or honesty) any more than it was something entirely new: like rock-and-roll's transformation to grown-up, serious 'rock', punk was a move towards something more gritty and authentic. When the Pistols sneered, "We mean it, maaaan," on 'God Save The Queen', they were merely underlining the first rule of rock: 'Thou Shalt Not Fake It'.

Greg Lake illustrated another aspect of this period. "European musicians tend to come from a classical heritage," he told an interviewer. "Whereas American bands tend to come from a blues-based heritage. That's the difference between bands like ELP, Yes and The Moody Blues, and bands like The Allman Brothers." British rock at the time had been concerned with classical ideas. Yes, Genesis and ELP had been cerebral; punk took rock back to its folksy, bluesy, physical roots. It was music to jump up and down to, not music to stroke your chin to.

The blues had a real relevance to punk and a direct bearing on some of its musicians. Joe Strummer of The Clash (whose nickname had been 'Woody' due to his fascination with Woody Guthrie) commented, "The songs I was listening to were all about Mississippi or Alabama or Lafayette, all these exotic places. What we had here was another world, and we wanted to bring some of that mythology to our world."

The Clash sang about the people they knew (guys who drove Cortinas and had shit jobs) and the places they lived (the Westway, Knightsbridge, Streatham). Stiff Little Fingers singer and guitarist Jake Burns – raised on a strict diet of Motown, Rory Gallagher, Dr Feelgood and Graham Parker – felt an immediate kinship. "Up until that point," he said, "it'd all been people like the Eagles singing about bowling down the California highway. Which didn't mean a damn thing to me. I hadn't been further west than Donegal. The Clash were writing songs about their own lives, and that really struck a chord with me. I thought, 'If they can write about growing up in London, then I can write about growing up in Belfast.'" (In the movie version of Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*, a young Green Day fan is pointed to Stiff Little Fingers' debut album as the place to hear 'real punk'.)

If the Teds had caused riots and the mods and rockers had known a thing or two about generating outrage, the punks took confrontation up as a hobby. In Manchester, a classically trained guitarist called Vini Reilly (later of The Durutti Column) formed Ed Banger And The Nosebleeds and thought up new ways of challenging his audience. "I'd do stuff like sit down and play a solo guitar piece with no accompaniment and my back to the audience," said Vini. "There'd be bottles being thrown at me by punks! One time we were playing at The Roxy in London and I persuaded everybody that we should just play two songs – the same two songs – all night. Which we did. It was a confrontationalist thing. It was fun, wild. Great times."

"It caused a sensation," said Damned bassist and guitarist Captain Sensible. "We'd come out of the stage doors and the van's windows would be smashed; the tyres slashed so you couldn't drive away. And at the end of the road, there'd be a bunch of soul boys or teddy boys with iron bars and bricks wanting to take you on. Those things happened. Nowadays it's fine for the likes of Blink 182 to come over and play Wembley or something, but we fought for the likes of them."

"Britain at that point seemed like it was just after World War II," recalled Damned vocalist Dave Vanian. "We stayed in that WWII mentality forever, it seemed. The 1960s had happened, but you wouldn't think so if you lived in a small town. People left school, got a suit and went to work. The Fleet Street people had bowler hats on. Anyone who looked different was considered totally outrageous. I can remember getting into huge conflabs about wearing an earring, for god's sake. The favourite phrase of the time was [dumb-bloke voice], 'Is that a boy or a ▶

girl? I can't tell these days, haw-haw!' I couldn't go anywhere in those days without someone, every day of my life, asking me if I was going to a funeral. No one wore black then, except for rockers.

"That's the thing a [modern rock or metal] fan can't appreciate. He can go out with his contact lenses, his hairpieces and piercings, and no one's going to bat an eyelid, apart from shout or something. But back then you could get into serious trouble."

Punk changed the industry, serving as the catalyst for the independent record label revolution. Labels such as Stiff, Rough Trade, Step Forward, Beggars Banquet, Rigid Digits and Small Wonder sprung up to service the hundreds of bands that followed in the wake of the Sex Pistols and The Clash. It seemed that anyone at all could form their own band and release a record. The mysterious art of guitar playing was blown wide open. "This is a chord," wrote Stranglers fanzine *Sideburns* next to a drawing of A, E and G chords. "This is another. This is a third. Now form a band."

The 1970s punk explosion burnt itself out quickly. By the early 1980s, it had become difficult to define exactly what 'punk' was. 'Punk' was what people called

Green Day was birthed by a new underground scene, raised on a diet of punk classics

Bob Vylan perfectly blends grime, hip-hop and punk

Blink 182's chart-friendly tunes still had an air of skater punk about them

bands such as The Exploited and Anti-Nowhere League. Punks were the guys drinking cider in Piccadilly Circus, their multicoloured Mohicans plastered on London postcards: a quaint curiosity for tourists. "Punk's not dead" was painted on a million studded leather jackets, and despite all the evidence to the contrary, it wasn't. Punk's influence was everywhere. New wave acts dented the charts throughout the early 1980s, while punk attitude spread through a million different sub-genres: ska (The Specials, The Beat, The Selecter), rockabilly (The Cramps, Stray Cats, The Meteors) and even folk (The Pogues, The Men They Couldn't Hang) were given a punk makeover. New Romantic and goth came from punk's futurism and nihilism. In the field of heavy rock and metal, punk inspired Motörhead, Hanoi Rocks, Guns N' Roses, Megadeth, Anthrax and Metallica.

By the late 1980s, straightforward punk pop was thriving. It was in the twee proto-indie of the *NME*'s C86 movement (the Soup Dragons' first single in 1986 was a full-on Buzzcocks rip-off; The Primitives initially sounded like the Ramones with a girl singer); then there was 'Fraggle' (a new generation of friendly and tuneful punk bands such as Senseless Things and Mega City Four, named after Fraggle Rock, a kids' TV show), the 'New Wave Of New Wave' (Buzzcocks/Clash rip-offs from S*M*A*S*H and These Animal Men), Riot Grrrl (feminist punk from Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear) and many more. Grunge mixed metal and punk (J Mascis of Dinosaur Jr credited Discharge; Kurt Cobain talked up the Au Pairs and The Raincoats). Britpop borrowed heavily from the original punks, too: Liam Gallagher sang like Johnny Rotten, Elastica nicked from the Stranglers and Wire (both of whom sued) and Blur blagged The Jam.

In America, meanwhile, a whole new scene had been brewing. Hardcore bands such as Bad Brains and Black Flag flourished, while the Descendents proved that punk didn't have to be all serious. The Orange County/Southern Californian punk scene owes a lot to those bands and the independent networks they set up.

Decades on from its origins in the New York club CBGB, punk is one of the biggest music genres on the planet. Bands such as the Ramones, the Sex Pistols, The Clash and The Jam have become classic rock bands: repackaged and resold to subsequent generations, the subject of documentaries, and granted places in the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame. The groups that they inspired in the 1980s – Gang Of Four, Wire, Orange Juice, Joy Division – have become the names to drop for a generation of indie bands such as Franz Ferdinand and The Futureheads. And Blink 182, The Offspring and, of course, Green Day have sold millions of albums, topped the charts on both sides of the Atlantic and introduced a new generation to the joys of obnoxious, spiteful, short, sharp rock songs played by people with more attitude than ability. Today, punk is seen giving the middle finger in the DNA of artists such as Amyl & The Sniffers and Dream Nails, or between the lines of Nova Twins, Bob Vylan and WILLOW.

And the verdict for Green Day? Well, that topic has dogged the East Bay trio since the release of *Dookie*, to the point of exhaustion. It's clear punk still runs riot in their minds, though their persona, music and ability to keep us guessing. An acoustic ballad with 'Good Riddance', a rock opera with *American Idiot*, a trilogy release with *Uno*, *Dos* and *Tré*, and flying the anti-establishment flag with *Saviors* – yeah, Green Day are punk as fuck. GD

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

C'mon Punk, Make Our Green Day

Billie Joe's songwriting has evolved from introspection to outward punk politics

'I ENJOY THE FACT THAT I'M MISUNDERSTOOD'

BILLIE JOE PLAYS IT COOL

FULL TIME IDIOT

Rewinding to the mid-2000s and meeting with the frontman of the hour, Billie Joe Armstrong

Words by James Jam

"I don't like justifying myself," declared Billie Joe Armstrong. "We're musicians. We're not really meant to answer questions."

Speaking to the man in the mid-2000s it quickly became apparent that he didn't like them all that much. "I always thought they were a way for someone to see the other side of the band, or a side they don't already know besides the music… but we keep getting asked all these weird questions!"

Despite his contempt for this particular interrogation that took place when *American Idiot* was reigning supreme across the world, though, the wily Billie Joe has a wealth of opinions. There was his disregard for fame – "I hate celebrities. I really hate them." There was his political outlook – he told *FHM* he'd "choke" President Bush given "half the chance". And then were his views on fellow musicians. Over the years, he had administered verbal kickings to Lynyrd Skynyrd ("Fucking backwards-ass hillbilly shit!"), Slipknot ("They sound like Tré choking on a hairball!") and his musical great-grandaddies the Sex Pistols ("Johnny Rotten sucks now!"). Billie Joe is the kind of musician who leaves dictaphones smouldering every time he opens his gob. When he speaks, the rock world listens.

From telling *The Advocate* "I think I've always been bisexual" to playfully toying with self-deprecation ("There's nothing wrong with being a loser – it just depends on how good you are at it"), the Oakland native has been tossing journalists juicy morsels since his band first came into existence at the end of the 1980s. Billie Joe's quotes veer from the silly to the sublime; his ▸

BILLIE JOE LOST HIS FATHER TO CANCER WHEN HE WAS 10 AND WROTE 'WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPTEMBER ENDS' AS A MEMORIAL TO HIM

'YOU CAN'T TAKE THE PUNK ROCK OUT OF US'

ANSWERING THE BAND'S CRITICS

American Idiot provoked Billie Joe Armstrong into writing about politics

persona is aloof yet alert – and meanwhile, his band's songbook sees odes to beating off nestling alongside a punk rock opera, among other things. "I'm a walking contradiction!" he told us on a 1996 single. "Too right you are!" we agree, scratching our heads. Will the real Billie Joe Armstrong please stand up?

"I enjoy the fact that I'm misunderstood most of the time," he chuckled. "That's fine. That's what keeps people guessing. As long as people are still talking and arguing about you, then you're still some kind of threat. I don't want to tell people what to do or think – I just want them to think."

Primarily, people want to talk to Billie Joe about punk. They want to question Green Day's right to claim that title. They think his band sold out the moment they shook hands with The Man. "When we signed to a major, a lot of people said we were using punk rock as a stepping stone for fame and fortune," explained Billie Joe. "People called it 'Gap punk', but I felt like we were probably an introduction to a kid that's going to buy Black Flag records later on. That's a positive thing."

As the band that broke the news to the mainstream that the death of punk had been greatly exaggerated, Billie Joe and company have been challenging the genre's traditionalists since the moment they bid adios to the underground. "We wanted to go from an independent to a major," said Billie Joe of the decision. "We got an offer from Epitaph, but we were like, 'Do we want to be on an independent pretending to be a major, or do we want to be on a real major?' We chose to go to Reprise." As a mainstay of the Berkeley scene, with Green Day a big fixture at the city's legendary Gilman Street venue, Billie Joe saw the backlash coming a mile off. "There's going to be people who will be bummed out," he told fanzine *360 Degrees*, before the move. "People ask, 'Why are you doing this?', and basically, it's because I fucking want to. The music hasn't changed. We're not changing ourselves to suit some big corporate record label. The music will be there if you want to listen to it."

Fighting the law: Billie Joe was arrested in 2003 for driving drunk in Berkeley, California

Inking their souls with the Warner Brothers imprint in 1994, Green Day dropped their major-label debut *Dookie* into the toilet bowl of American youth culture in the months following the move. "'Dookie' is slang for shit," Billie Joe giggled. "It was going to be called 'Liquid Dookie', but we thought that was too gross!" Nevertheless, MTV took the record and ran with it, programming back-to-back schedules of choice cuts 'Longview', 'Basket Case' and 'When I Come Around,' helping to make Green Day that year's biggest success story.

Some believed the very notion of 'major-label punk' was a contradiction in terms. Others claimed that Green Day

had committed the cardinal punk rock sin and cashed in their integrity for the filthy lucre of mainstream success.

"People are still arguing about that stuff," sighed Billie Joe. "When we started playing punk rock, it was a proven fact that punk could not get popular. You couldn't become a millionaire off the back of this music. In fact, people were afraid to say the P word! We never played punk rock to become famous, and I never thought that being obnoxious would make me successful. What I always say to people is, 'You can take us out of our punk rock environment, but you can't take the punk rock out of us.'" However, all this discourse around Green Day and punk was something Billie Joe was clearly tired of having to defend. "When we started out as a band, we played punk rock music, then we changed our sound – but we didn't change who we were. I just like writing songs, and if someone thinks that's some kind of punk rock dichotomy, then they can go fuck themselves."

Whichever side of the fence you choose to swing your legs, there's no disputing that in the years that followed the success of *Dookie*, Billie Joe struggled against the creative binds of pop punk with every facet of his very being. If 1995's *Insomniac* was essentially *Dookie* with songs about self-loathing instead of self-abuse, then 1997's *Nimrod* saw the songwriter determined to fracture the three-chord mould with a record that would begin to ask questions of how his band were perceived.

"I pushed myself to write the best record that I possibly could," he said, and from the off, it was clear that *Nimrod* was an ambitiously directed labour of love. Woven among the familiar-sounding tunes, *Nimrod* had moments of heartfelt introspection, unlike anything the band had previously committed to tape. What's more, he went one step further and wrote a ballad; the sentimental folk-strum gem entitled 'Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)'. "Putting that song on the record made me nervous," he says. "For me to kind of step out and challenge myself and our crowd – to say there is beauty in life, there is hope – well, that song has freed us in a lot of respects.

"I don't want to limit myself musically," he added. "All I want to do is write good songs. I want to develop and go into different styles, cross my boundaries of the two-and-a-half-minute punk song with a three-and-a-half-minute jazz song. Maybe get into swing or rockabilly."

Words by Darren James

Strong but not silent: Billie Joe ain't shy about speaking or singing about what's on his mind

Billie Joe has two sons with his wife, Adrienne: Joey (pictured) and Jakob

Which is exactly what Green Day did with their next shift in creative focus, the release of 2000's *Warning*. Billie Joe was quick to declare it as being their "classic rock-and-roll record", and with over 13 tracks of confident, ambitious arrangements, it stomped with a strut rather than the punk sneer of old. As on *Nimrod*, acoustic guitars and additional instrumentation returned in force, but this record was notable for much more than the textured quirks of their sound. *Warning* succeeded in showcasing Billie Joe's fragile heart as he'd never dared to do before. Many of the songs were haunting statements of sadness, and there were times when it sounded like Billie Joe might be on the verge of bursting into tears.

"I think that when rock stars get pretty big," he remarked, "a lot of them go way deep inside themselves and shut out the world. That's sort of what happened to me. I became disconnected with what was going on. That's what this record is about: channelling my anger and angst into things that are really important. Trying to find something that comes out of it that's positive."

The most positive consequence of *Warning* was the continuation of Billie Joe's development as a songwriter of note. Experimenting with sounds and arrangements, extending his capabilities with each record released, he was starting to win praise for 'maturing' as an 'artist'. "We have a lot of punk rock in our background," said Billie Joe, "but now, we're just doing something a little bit different. We don't want to stick ourselves in one genre for the rest of our lives. Our live shows have seen a new generation of people coming out, and I don't have a problem with that at all.

"Whatever we do in the past," he added, "we leave that and go on to the next chapter. We always try to keep reinventing ourselves and come out with something that's new."

There are few who would disagree that Green Day made one of their best records in 2004; the multi-layered, sonically sprawling, George W. Bush (and now Donald Trump)-baiting rock opera *American Idiot*. Essentially a concept album, narrative in its structure and indebted to the kind of work pioneered by Billie Joe's old favourites The Who with 1969's *Tommy*, it was unlike anything planet rock had seen in years. It's clever. It's impassioned. It reeks of ambition. "A punk rock opera!" Billie Joe smiled. "I don't think anybody has thought of that before!

What's more, in addition to expanding the genre's horizons, *American Idiot* finally saw the emergence of Billie Joe as a politically savvy songsmith. Although he'd been keen to distance Green Day from politics for the majority of their career, the events of 9/11, the subsequent occupation of Iraq and the barrage of bullshit that overcame him every time he flicked on the telly led him to pen a work more outward-looking than any he'd ever turned his hand to before.

"Reality TV meets news and war. Tanks going into Baghdad with splashes of Viagra commercials in between. I was so confused about what was going on I had to write about it," he said. "All my songwriting is about creating a statement and taking action. As time has gone on, and because of the climate around me, I've just felt more responsibility to think about politics."

If *American Idiot* saw Billie Joe Armstrong coming of age politically, it also tells you more about who he is than any of his output over his career. It's the work of an artist willing to buck the trend and do his own thing, defiant and detuned to the bitching punk bores of his past. It sees the musical styles he loves – as varied as the coloured dye he once sported in his hair – fused together into one complete package. It's the sound of someone who's willing to pick fault with the world around him, and what's more, committed to fighting for a better way. It provides incontrovertible proof that Billie Joe Armstrong is his own

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

man. It's unlikely there's any clearer definition of what the word 'punk' could ever hope to mean.

"The thing that people should realise," he stresses, "is that I've always listened to all kinds of great songwriters, from Bikini Kill to the Rolling Stones to The Replacements… just good songs. I'm definitely more influenced by songwriters than punk."

With that in mind, let's ask the question again. Will the real Billie Joe Billie Joe please stand up? "I think before we're a punk band, before I'm a punk rocker, I'm a songwriter," he says.

And a darn punk one at that. GD

'ALL MY SONGWRITING IS ABOUT TAKING ACTION'

BJ ON MIXING MUSIC WITH POLITICS

Billie Joe is known for his punk aesthetic and developed an eyeliner with Kat Von D

'WE ARE MORE SERIOUS THAN YOU THINK'

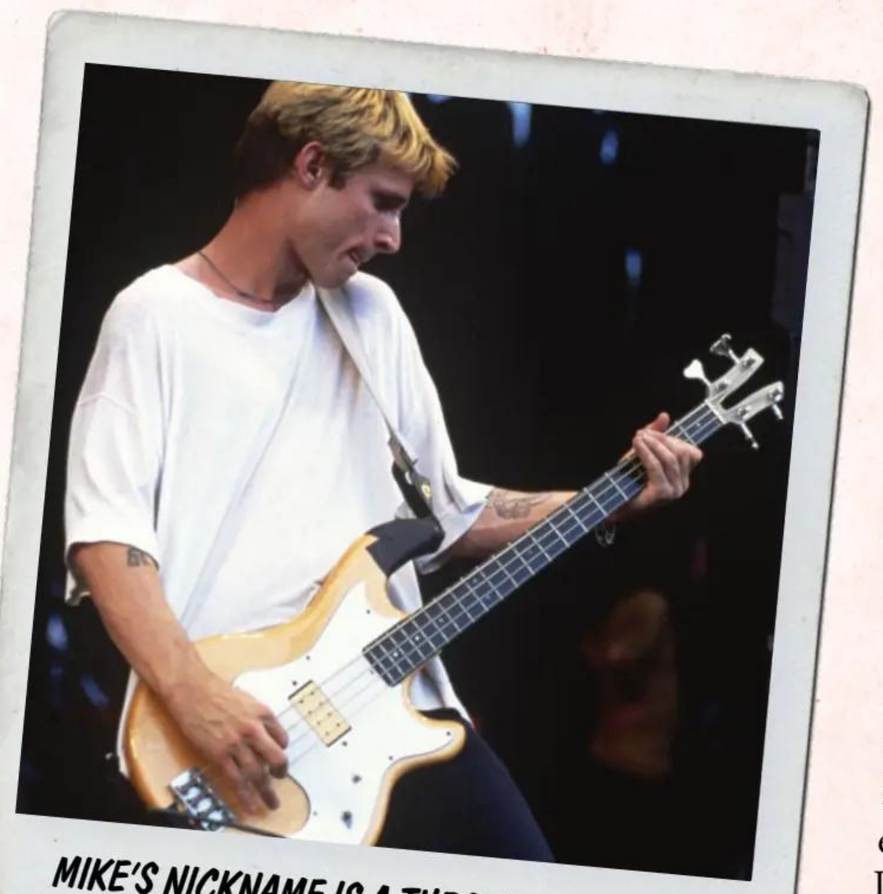
MIKE ON PUNK POLITICS

Despite the punk aesthetic and attitude, Mike is level-headed and cool

BASS IN YOUR FACE

Rewinding to the mid-2000s where we sat down with Green Day's musing Mike Dirnt

Words by James Jam



MIKE'S NICKNAME IS A THROWBACK TO HIS SCHOOL DAYS – 'DIRNT' IS THE NOISE HE USED TO MAKE AS HE AIR GUITARED

Mike

Dirnt will happily gurn and goof for you if you ask him nicely. He'll dutifully play the role of postcard punk to perfection, striking poses that exude a certain sussed, street-smart cool for every flicker of the camera shutter. In the decades that have elapsed since the band's breakthrough record, *Dookie*, it's images like this that have formed the cornerstone of many a Green Day photoshoot.

There's a natural derisiveness in his craggy face, a sussed 'fuck you' slouch to his hunched posture, and the sneering upturned nostril in his live performance would have you believe he's the offspring of any number of punk-rock-fuelled fluid-swaps.

However, the bassist is anything but sneering. Affable and astute, he seems like a man at ease with himself – and we're surprised to learn of the heart problems that besieged his health as a child, resulting in infrequent panic attacks. The pragmatic, paternal ringmaster to Billie Joe's maudlin sad-clown skit, and a stony-faced flip-side to Tré's custard-pie high jinks, Mike is the 5'10" Gandalf watching over his kohl-eyed rock-and-roll hobbit companions. If Billie Joe is the artist and Tré Cool the performer, then he is the weight that grounds the Berkeley band within the realms of reality.

Born Michael Ryan Pritchard on 4 May 1972, he picked up the name Dirnt back in high school, where he would pretend to play the bass in recess. He would make the noise of someone playing single notes on a bass, which sounded akin to a ploddy 'dirnt, dirnt, dirnt'. His attitude when this interview took place in the mid-2000s was carefree and thoughtful – even when he was hit with a spin on the 'Green Day ain't punk rock' debate straight off the bat. "I agree," he laughed. "It's kind of an oxymoron to say 'punk rock' and 'hockey arena' at the same time. We definitely come from a certain

element, and we have a certain idea of what we like. We carry our morals, our ideals, our ethics and everything with us from where we come from."

He glanced at the waitress in the café he was sitting in, then at his coffee mug, all the while twiddling a sugar spoon between his long, calloused fingers. "But I can't say I am the same person as I was five years ago. I'd be kidding myself to say I'm that person. I think the most important thing you can do is to be honest with yourself."

The tattooed sage gulps down his first latte of the afternoon, letting out an 'ah' with a satisfied sense of wry amusement. "It's not a problem," he continued. "I mean, we make music for people who want to hear our music, and we make music for ourselves as well. Ultimately, what it comes down to for us is whether we please ourselves and write good songs.

"When we create these CDs," he mused, "we give them to people. Then [the music] is theirs to pick and poke and prod at, or to love and hold and cherish – whatever you want to do with it. One of the greatest joys of playing music at all is sharing it and playing it for people."

The bassist first met Billie Joe Armstrong in his school canteen, at age 10. The two quickly became friends, sharing an adolescent desire to play heavy metal guitar. Early Billie Joe and Mike jam sessions yielded their interpretative versions of 'Ain't Talking About Love' by Van Halen and 'Photograph' by Def Leppard. By the eighth grade, Mike and his mate Billie Joe were penning their own tunes.

"Then all of a sudden we got introduced to punk music and it was the coolest freakin' thing," recalled Mike, his blue eyes igniting at the memory. "I mean, here we are playing loud music on junky amps and everything, and that's exactly what those bands were doing. It wasn't so much how they influenced us – it just kept us energised."

We were interested to hear how the bassist thinks his band have changed over the years. From heavy metal to punk rock in the space of a school year. From snotty, disillusioned, three-chord adolescents to the most revered alt-rock musicians in the world. How did they rise from such lowly beginnings to become the purveyors of international superhits?

"I think we have changed a lot," he offered. "People say, 'You're more mature,' or whatever, but I think we're just more experienced at everything. We've learned to approach songwriting from a multitude of directions now, not just one source. There are no rules to this band. I feel that the longer this band goes, the more we explore new avenues. We love challenging ourselves. If we are afraid of something – if it scares us – I think we're probably on to something good."

Mike's youth was peppered with sadness – he has every right to savour the success his band has earned. His biological mother was a heroin addict who gave him up for adoption at birth, while the couple who took him in split when he was only seven. At first, he lived with his father, then with his mother. Then his beloved elder sister left home when she was just 13. "There were all sorts of things happening," he explained. "When I was in fourth or fifth grade, my mom stayed out all night, came home the next day with a guy, and then he moved in. I'd never met the guy before, and all of a sudden he's my stepdad."

At school, the future star found studying tough. Especially when his wayward mother wasn't around to authorise his absentee slips and term reports. Two unexcused absences lost him a full grade point, and at the end of his senior year, he was down to lowly ▶

Mike started out playing heavy metal covers with Billie Joe Armstrong

Bass in your hookup

Words by Byrdene Sadler

'IT WAS THE COOLEST FREAKING THING'

MIKE REMEMBERS HIS INTRODUCTION TO PUNK

Mike laments that he will never be able to see Green Day live

results, as opposed to the good grades he'd worked so hard to achieve. "I took my mom aside," he recalled, "and I said to her, 'This is how it is. You have so much shit going on in your life, so if once every semester you ask me if I've done my homework and jump all over my case, that's not right. Have I failed yet? No. And I'm going to graduate if you stay off my back. The one time in your life you choose to have morals, and it's going to fuck me up. Don't play mom once a year. It doesn't fucking cut it.'

"Later on, when I hit high school, my mom moved away, and my stepdad and me got real close. He instilled a lot in me. The one thing my family did give me is blue-collar morals." Mike's blue eyes look tougher than ever. "But he died when I was 17," he sighed. "Life is full of challenges. You just have to stare them straight in the eye and walk forward."

Mike graduated from high school that year and went on to enrol for more than a year's worth of courses at community college. He and Billie Joe moved into a squat in Oakland, California. Against all odds, Mike Dirnt made good.

"I used to ride my bicycle a lot," he laughed when the conversation switched gears to fonder childhood memories. "I was silly on bicycles when I was a little kid. I've got a lot of good little memories from when I was a little kid. But I don't stop and look back and rest on my laurels at all," he smiled. "I'm too busy thinking about what's going on in the future. Not the distant future, though. Mainly today until tonight."

We wondered where 'home' must be for a man who spends most of his life out on tour, and whether that can be a headfuck after such modest beginnings…

"I don't think we have the stereotypical touring-musician lifestyle," said Mike in response. "Well, we work a hard shift – we hit the road every single night – but we don't stay in hotels. We have the most exciting job on tour because we get to play every day and we live for that, but we also have the most boring job on tour, you know – doing interviews and standing around all day; hurrying up and waiting. So it's a hard one for sure." He smiles a toothy smile and taps the table with his fingertips. "But playing music is so much fun. I love my job!

"I just try not to put myself on a pedestal and think it's more than it is," he continued wisely. "You have to remember you're here today and gone later today. We don't go out and buy Ferraris and throw ourselves into the whole lifestyle. We've been weaned into it really well. We'd been going on tour for years before we ever signed to a major label. We'll go on tour for months, and then when we come back, our friends will give us a head check. That's been happening for years. We'll leave for two months, come back, leave for three months, come back, and every time, our friends give us a head check. I think that we're pretty firmly grounded in who we are and where we come from."

But 2004 rolled by and the understanding of Green Day shifted in the public consciousness. The release of their 'punk opera', the sprawling, multidimensional *American Idiot*, demonstrated that they were a band with a savvy brain, a heart and a firm understanding of the unsettled times it was written in. "Each of us in this band," he drawled, "is more serious than you might think."

There's a common misconception that *American Idiot* was a battle cry for a wounded generation. A musical uprising against the stifling, dumbed-down, corporate/conservative thinking propagated by our moronic media culture – or so many would have it. An angry statement of disgust at the atrocities being committed on both home and foreign soil. Well, not to these ears. While *American Idiot* is, in part, all of the above, to this writer, it sounded more like a yearning, confused love letter to the untapped potential of the free world. Mike was keen to clarify.

"What *American Idiot* screams is that my band and I aren't represented by this government run by George Bush and his cronies," he declared. "They don't represent my moral stance. They don't hold my values, and if you ignore the way things are going today, then you're living in a fantasy."

He looked at his palms outstretched on the table and then clenched his fist with frustration. "We were compelled to make this album. This album says that you're losing your individuality. You're pissed off. You're being misrepresented. It says that I don't know what I want, but I do know I don't want to be an American idiot.

"Any sales or acclaim or anything is nice, but this album is about making a statement. We want people to buy it but also understand where we're coming from. That's so important."

But fans of the old, snappy, melodically punchy Green Day didn't need to be alarmed. Mike and co did not forsake their past; they only endeavour to pen a new chapter in their history. Live, they still play the old hits as well as the new material. "We're turning into the punk rock Bruce Springsteen" Mike jokes. "Our show is all about maximum impact. I wish I could see my band live," he giggled with echoes of sincerity. "I'll never be able to see Green Day live, and that sucks." GD

Bass in Your Face

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

Those manic eyes aren't for show, Tré Cool is the real deal

'I WAS SHOOTING FIRE OUT OF MY MOUTH!'

TRÉ DISCOVERS PYROMANIA

THE BASKET CASE

He's the clown prince of the sticks. We survive an encounter with Tré Cool

"Shit happens, man," smirked the Green Day drummer, speaking to us during the mid-2000s. "You get gasoline, you fuck around with it a little bit, it goes all over your face – before you know it, your head is on fire." Welcome to a day in the life of Mr Tré Cool. Danger! Danger! Danger!

Born Frank Edwin Wright III in Frankfurt, Germany, the son of a discharged Vietnam helicopter pilot turned house-builder and the energy room for Berkeley pop-punk sensations Green Day, Tré Cool isn't exactly your average Joe. Bursting into the world on 9 December 1972, our subject can be variously described as a streetwise idiot savant, punk rock prankster and drum-thrashing powerhouse. Clearly, there was much we needed to learn to attempt to understand him. We had to learn the sordid truth behind the one-man wrecking ball's clash with Radiohead, fondness for putting his cock ring in rock journalists' palms, and just how he came to be rewarded with megabucks for his unrivalled talent of hitting things with sticks and blowing stuff up – often himself. Speaking of which, let's return to the point where Tré Cool came to realise that his head was on fire.

"I was shooting fire out of my mouth!" he remembered proudly. "So far, I've managed to make it to 30 feet. This one time, I'd had too much fuel and not enough air, so it shot back and my mouth exploded. I looked like Freddy Krueger! It was fucking cool, dude!"

Of course, we shouldn't expect anything else from the guy who describes himself as being "like a 12-year-old with responsibility", and who once milked a dog because he wanted his coffee white and he'd run out of dairy. The man who freely admitted to being "the biggest dick" in Green Day, and whose primary ambition is to "survive an avalanche".

He listed, "fisher-Price music, nursery rhymes and the alphabet song" as his musical influences, while his

TRÉ AND NO DOUBT BASSIST TONY KANAL LIVE IT UP AT MADONNA'S 1998 VMA AFTERPARTY IN LOS ANGELES

'I'M LIKE A SACK OF POTATOES'

TRÉ THINKS HIGHLY OF HIMSELF

Tré named Ringo Starr as the greatest drummer of all time – aside from himself, of course

Tré is a prankster through and through: approach with caution

contributions to the band include writing several songs about masturbation – as well as, naturally, "bashing the fuck out of my drums".

You name it, Tré has indeed done it – or said it, or suffered from it. He lost one of his testicles in a unicycle accident and says his most memorable festival experience was "when I almost got my head bitten off wrestling an alligator".

"I've been on fire four times," he told us, "and I've been on fire twice on stage. I've been hospitalised many times. My hands are like leather, which is pretty cool. I've had therapists yelling at me for not taking better care of my body. I'm like a sack of potatoes to be abused at will." He laughed. "Huh huh huh! There was this one time that I got a concussion back in Rhode Island…" Uh-oh.

"…No, that's not right. That's where the bouncer threw me around," he remembered, correcting himself. "I actually got the concussion in New York City. The paramedics wanted to take me to hospital right there and then, but I was like, 'No, I'm cool.' It was funny. Huh huh huh!"

Tré Cool finds a lot of things funny. His brain is one long, never-ending *Tom and Jerry* cartoon, while his approach to slapstick humour makes *Home Alone* appear comparatively subtle. So what was the best stunt he's ever pulled?

"Well, we were staying in LA at the Chateau Marmont hotel for six months recording a record, and the drummer from that English, old, stuffy band called Radiohead moves in next door for a few days. We're partying in my room, having a good time with the stereo on, drinking, whatever. Then I see this guy walking out of my room with a bathrobe on. I'm like, 'What the fuck is this? Who's in my fucking room?' And my friends are like, 'Oh, that was the guy next door – he said to turn it down.' I'm like, 'Oh, really?' It was on at that point."

The poor bastard…

"I went and got some rope and I put a slip knot around his doorknob. Then I went over across the way to a handrail and then tied it securely to the handle. In the morning, when he was trying to get to his gig at Coachella, he couldn't open the door and he had to call security to come let him out."

It was at this point we realised that we should have set up a panic button. Tré laughs. "Huh huh huh!" His cackling sounded like the gates of hell opening ▶

Tré's expert and energetic kit-bashing is a calling card of Green Day

wide while Satan unleashed his irksome minions. And if the Radiohead incident isn't enough for you, there was that one with the cock ring and the rock journo.

"Man, he was pissed off!" Tré told *Record Collector*. "He got a fistful of my nuts! I had this sweaty ball ring on my dick and I just handed it to him and said, 'Here, I've been wearing that for hours.' He said, 'Euurgh, you fucker,' and ran off to wash his hands."

This refreshingly matter-of-fact/childishly reckless thinking is a hallmark of our hero. He's a man with no time for pussyfooting around or pretentiousness: he says it like it is, and fuck the consequences. Tré on sex: "Sometimes you jack off so much you get blackheads all over your dick. You get athlete's cock." On drink: "The night before last we were drinking as much as we could so that we could piss out of our window in Madrid. Taxi drivers were putting their hands out and going, 'Is it raining?'" On drugs: "What you should do is get some cereal in the morning before you go and cover it in crystal meth. You get as high as heels and the cereal will pass through you before you leave the house. It's got the fibre to push through anything that's stuck in the colon. I'm an asshole expert!"

So, well, that gives you some idea of what we're dealing with. However, what we really want to know is, how did Tré come to find himself playing drums for Green Day in the first place? After all, they'd already made one record and a clutch of EPs before he sauntered towards the drum stool. Tré picks up the story.

"I started out playing punk rock when I was 11 years old. That's when I was in my first band, The Lookouts. The other guys were 38 and 16, and they were just going in to make their first album. They needed a drummer pretty badly because the last one had moved to Brazil and the guitarist kept her drums. I was like, 'Hey, let me try out!' So immediately, the guitarist takes away my cymbals because I was bashing and thrashing them. I had to play a lot of fast punk rock right away. That was the beginning of my drumming days.

It was at this point that the chaos began to subside and we felt a little more at ease opposite Tré. "Drums started to be the only thing I was excited about," he continued. "School sucked. I was a bad student. Too rambunctious, and I never paid attention. But I thought bands were cool. I was totally into the idea of being in a band. I liked how bands looked at the award shows in their little sparkle suits. I wanted to practise real hard and get to that level. When you're a little kid, that stuff looks pretty impressive."

Encouraging Tré to gush about his primary passion brings something out in the man that's almost cool and composed. The man clearly loves drums, and – let's cut to the chase here – Tré Cool is a fucking awesome drummer. You don't get to that point by being a pyro-obsessed prankster, and you don't learn to do what he can do by goofing off. Upon discovering the drums, Tré Cool found his love.

"I used to come over and play with them [Lawrence Livermore and bassist Kain Kong]," he said. "I didn't know what I was doing, but they were playing punk songs and I just started keeping the beat. The guitarist stuck all my cymbals up in the closet. He didn't want me getting carried away. From that point on I was always playing punk and trying to get faster and tighter and better.

"I wanted to be like the guy from Duran Duran," Tré recalled. "I was listening to punk all day, and so I really started paying attention to what the drummers were doing. I didn't get my own set till my dad sprung for a Pearl kit for my 13th birthday, but then I got some headphones and a Walkman and started playing along to The Cars, Zeppelin and AC/DC." He laughed, but less manically. "Playing along to AC/DC is the best way to learn how to play rock! They're the easiest drum parts ever, and they make you feel like you're king of the world almost right away!"

‘I THOUGHT MIKE WAS FUNNY. HE CRACKED ME UP’

TRÉ COOL HITS IT OFF WITH GREEN DAY

With Larry Livermore’s strict tutelage and his own drive to be “the best drummer in the world”, Tré got good in double-quick time. Before long, the new-look Lookouts were playing and hanging out at the city’s Gilman Street venue, and it was there that Tré was to meet Green Day. “I thought Mike was funny,” he told Live magazine. “He was cracking me up. We smoked weed, drank beers, had a good time.” The new friendships he forged at Gilman Street even saw him giving advice to Green Day’s then-drummer, John Kiffmeyer (aka Al Sobrante).

“I was friends with their drummer,” he said, “though he was way older than me. He’s left-handed and he played all goofy, with the kick drum on the right and the side cymbal on the left. He used to make these wonderful, cool mistakes. Playing these beats where it sounded like you’re falling downstairs.”

When Al left the band for college, Billie Joe and Mike knew just whose posterior could fill the vacant stool. Up stepped Tré Cool, a man who has spent a lifetime making bad decisions, but who at that moment made his wisest move ever. Green Day, as we know it today, was good to go.

Do you think, as you get older, you’re chilling out a little? Mellowing out? Growing up? “Aw, fuck no!” he shouted. “Matured, maybe, but not grown up. I don’t have a hairy body yet. I’m still the guinea pig if there are any drugs thrown on stage. Then again, I could say I’ve grown up a little, because now, instead of walking through a plate-glass window – like, ‘Oh yeah, a plate-glass window! Crash!’ – I’ll at least say, ‘Wait a minute! If I jump through that plate-glass window, it’s going to cut me really bad, and I’ll probably spend the rest of my night getting stitched up in the hospital.’”

We take it from this that, despite the occasional sporadic outburst of mayhem, Tré’s days of completely unrestrained chaos are now behind him. Maybe we didn’t need that panic button on standby, after all. “It’s been a pleasure talking to you, Tré – thanks for your time,” we said, as we extended our hand as a sign of our gratitude. Tré takes it and places his palm against it, and it’s at this precise moment that we realise the terrible consequences of our actions. We feel the warm, damp squib of a cylindrical aluminium widget in our fist as Tré speeds off into the distance.

“I’m the greatest rock-and-roll drummer on the planet, and you suck!” he yelped, as he charged off in pursuit of gasoline and matches, cackling as he goes. “Huh huh huh!”

Euurgh. You fucker. GD

Drumming legends of the 1990s unite: Dave Grohl gives Tré a cuddle

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

Words by Lawrence Livermore

The Story of Green Day

THE EARLY DAYS

1987-1994

Who better to recall the teenaged Green Day, the Gilman Street punk underground and the fledgling Lookout! label than the man who started it all? Lawrence Livermore

"What's

the East Bay?" people often ask me. The answer is that it's a mass of suburbs – some middle-class, mostly working-class – stretching along the eastern side of San Francisco Bay. The snobs used to call it 'East Berlin' because it was supposedly so drab and grey.

It's not that bad, but in 1986, it wasn't exactly a hotbed of punk rock activity. In fact, it was more like living in a graveyard. The few shows that happened took place in illegal warehouse venues or a basement or garage, and they were always getting shut down by the cops or ending up in fights or with the joint getting trashed.

After all the excitement of the late-70s/early-80s punk explosion, it was depressing. Most people figured punk was dead and buried, but a few of us weren't ready to give up just yet. We found an empty warehouse in the wastelands of West Berkeley and talked the city into letting us fix it up as an all-ages, volunteer-run club. We called it the Gilman Street Project, but soon everybody knew it simply as Gilman Street or just plain Gilman.

It was like that film *Field of Dreams*: "If you build it, they will come." When Gilman opened, there was only a handful of bands in the East Bay; within months, bands were coming out of the woodwork. Half of them were in high school. Kids who never even thought about being in a band saw their friends up on stage and thought, "If they can do that, why can't I?"

One of the youngest kids at Gilman was in my band, The Lookouts. I gave him his first drum lesson when he was 12, and he joined our band a week later. "You need a punk name if you're going to be in a punk band," I told him. "From now on you're Tré Cool."

Tré was 13 when we recorded our first album and 14 when we started playing at Gilman. When he was 15, he set up a show that would help change rock-and-roll history. "Some kids at my school are having a party this Friday night," he told me. "Can The Lookouts play?"

We were living in the backwoods of Mendocino County, a remote, mountainous area 140 miles north of the East Bay. We were always having to drive down there to play shows, so we were happy for a chance to play close to home.

Then I got a call from John Kiffmeyer, aka Al Sobrante. John had played drums in a Gilman band called Isocracy, who were famous for their practice of bringing huge bags of rubbish to shows – everything from old bicycle tyres to mannequins to mountains of confetti – and throwing it at the audience. Who, of course, threw it right back.

"Listen," he said, "I'm in a new band with these two kids from Rodeo. We're called Sweet Children, and I was wondering if you knew any shows we could play."

"Not much going on right now," I told him. "The only show we've got coming up is this high-school party that Tré set up for us."

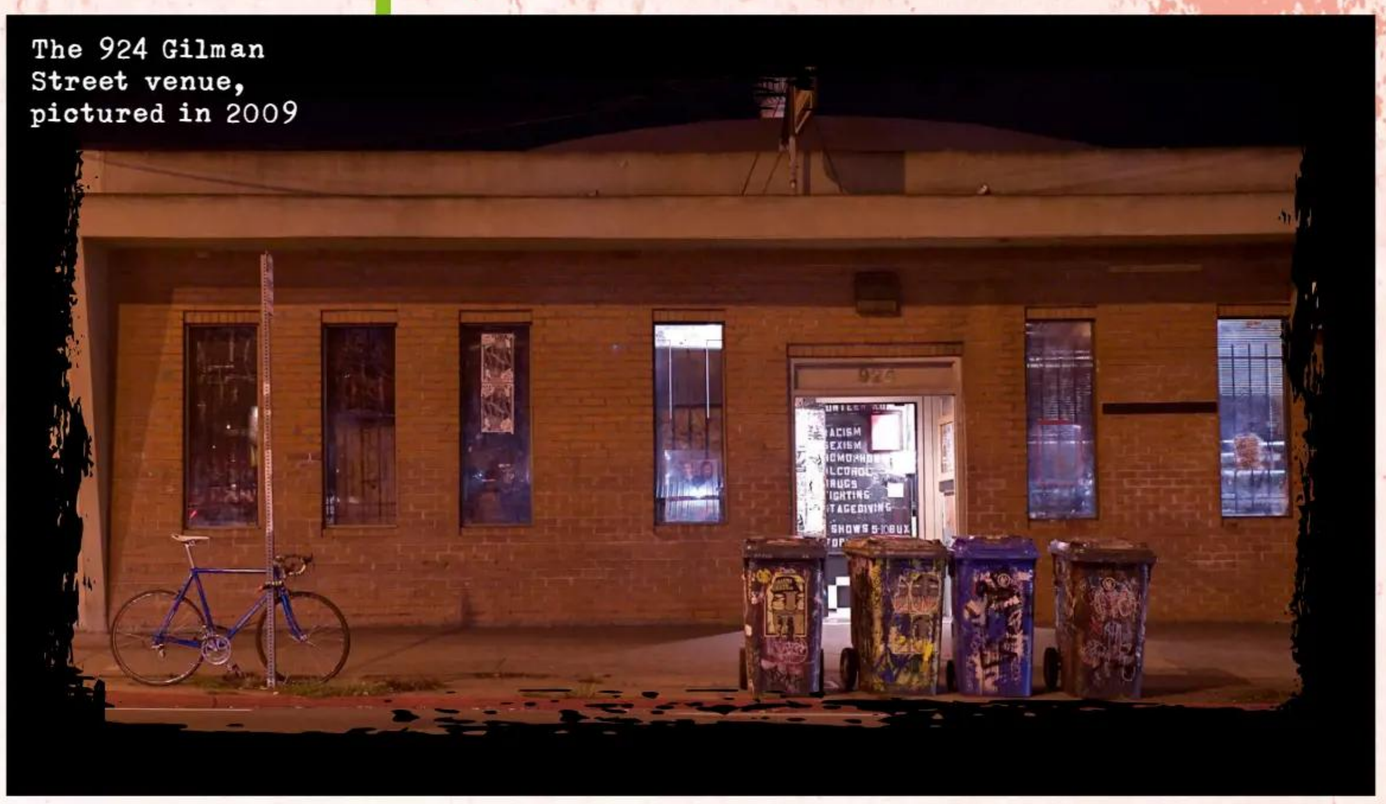
"Can we play too?"

"Dude, it'd be a 280-mile round trip for you guys; it's up in the mountains, it's supposed to snow, we don't even know if anybody will show up. And there's no money for the bands: not even for gas."

"We'll be there," said John.

The 'party' was a total fiasco. When we got there, five kids were standing around freezing outside an old wooden cabin. Nobody had a key, so we had to break in. There was no heat except for a wood stove, no light except for candles, and no electricity until we brought in a generator to power the amps.

Tré stepped in when Al Sobrante went off to college, and Green Day went into overdrive



The 924 Gilman Street venue, pictured in 2009

Mike's bucket said, "Donate or Die!"

'ARE YOU CRAZY? YOU CAN'T CHANGE YOUR NAME AT THE LAST MINUTE'

LARRY RECALLS WHEN SWEET CHILDREN BECAME GREEN DAY

But none of that mattered when Sweet Children started playing. Billie Joe and Mike were barely 16 years old at the time, but you'd have thought they'd been on stage all their lives. The 'audience' might have been five kids sitting on the floor in a candlelit cabin, but Billie treated them as if they were a packed house at Wembley Stadium.

I was in awe. I'd seen amazing bands in my time – the MC5, The Stooges, the Rolling Stones, The Who, Led Zeppelin, The Ramones, the Sex Pistols and The Clash, to name a few – but these kids were already in that class, and this was only their third or fourth show ever.

They finished their set, and Billie walked over to me and shyly asked, "So what did you think?"

"I want to put out your record," was all I could say.

I don't know if he took me seriously. I'm not even sure how serious I was. But a couple of months later, Sweet Children were in the studio recording four songs for their first seven-inch EP, *1,000 Hours*. Two weeks before it was supposed to come out, they told me they were changing their name to Green Day.

"What, are you crazy?" I said. "You can't change your name at the last minute! How will anybody know it's you? Besides, Green Day's a stupid name."

I should have saved my breath. They might have been just kids, but when it came to band stuff, they knew what they wanted to do and went ahead and did it. We made a new cover, and the record came out on schedule in April 1989.

It didn't sell much – maybe 1,000 copies that first year – but that was OK. I'd started Lookout! Records a couple of years earlier with $4,000 saved up from my dole money, and never really expected to make any of it back. The biggest record we'd done so far was a seven-inch EP by another Gilman band called Operation Ivy, which had sold about 2,500 copies. What mattered most to me was that at least a few Green Day songs would be preserved for posterity. With bands regularly forming and breaking up every few months, that was no small thing.

Green Day didn't break up; instead, they played every show they could get. Some punks sneered at them for being 'too pop', and at least once they were refused a show at Gilman for that reason. They weren't the only future superstars to have trouble getting a gig there: Nirvana got turned down because "nobody's ever heard of you guys". ▶

The band
would play
any and every
gig around

'JOHN WAS PLAYING HARD LIKE HE WAS THE MAN... AND ONE THING YOU CANNOT DO TO TRÉ IS OUTDRUM HIM'

BJ REMEMBERS A DRUM-OFF

Later that year, I sent Green Day into the studio to make an album. They spent two days and a grand total of $675 to produce *39/Smooth*. It came out in April 1990, and that summer, the band set out on their first national tour.

It wasn't the most professional of tours. Their first stop was Arcata, a small college town on the North Coast, and when Green Day arrived, they discovered that nobody had bothered to organise anywhere for them to play. The show went ahead in the living room of someone's apartment. Things went more smoothly after that, if you don't count the usual problems with broken-down vans, cancelled shows and dodgy promoters. While in Minneapolis, the band recorded a four-song EP of some Sweet Children songs, and Billie Joe met the girl who, four years later, would become his wife.

By the time they got back to Berkeley, everything seemed to be going Green Day's way. The album was selling well, they were being offered gigs everywhere, and Billie and Mike couldn't wait to get back out on the road again. But John had other plans. It turned out he'd been planning on moving to Arcata for two years to finish college, but hadn't got around to telling the band about it. Billie found out from some mutual friends.

"It blew me away," he told me. "I was hurt. One, because I had to hear it from someone else, but also because John was a big influence to us. We were so young, and we learned a lot from him."

It looked like the band might be over just when it was really getting started. John told Billie and Mike that he'd come back for shows now and then, but apart from that, they'd have to put the band on hold for a couple of years. "We were far too young and full of energy to wait six months or a year for someone to play gigs," said Billie. "At 18, that's like half a lifetime. At the same time, I had this romantic thing about how the gang doesn't split up; the band doesn't split up. I didn't want to look for another member – it was too cheesy, too lame."

As it turned out, they didn't have to find another member: he was there all along. A couple of months earlier, Billie had come into the studio with The Lookouts to play some lead guitar and add backing vocals for what would turn out to be our last record.

We'd shared many gigs, going back to that mountain party in 1988, but this would be the first time Billie and Tré actually played music together. After John left for college in September of 1990, Billie and Mike started jamming with Tré, and in November, Green Day played their first show with Tré on drums.

I was excited to see how well Tré blended in with the band, but sad, too, because I knew it probably meant the end of The Lookouts. Tré didn't become a full member right away. John was still coming back to play some gigs, but he was also playing with another band at college.

That winter, Green Day shared a gig with John's band, The Ne'er Do Wells, and Billie recalls, "John was playing really hard, trying to make it look like he was the man, and one thing you cannot do to Tré is out-drum him. One of the first songs we played was 'Longview', which is a great drummer's song, and from that point on, it was like, 'Dude, you're so over.'"

Once they'd settled on Tré as their permanent drummer, I urged Green Day to get back in the studio to record a new album. It turned out they weren't ready; they laid down six tracks before admitting that was all the material they had.

I feared without John to keep things organised, the band might start drifting, but I needn't have worried. That autumn, they went back to the studio and emerged with their second album, *Kerplunk*.

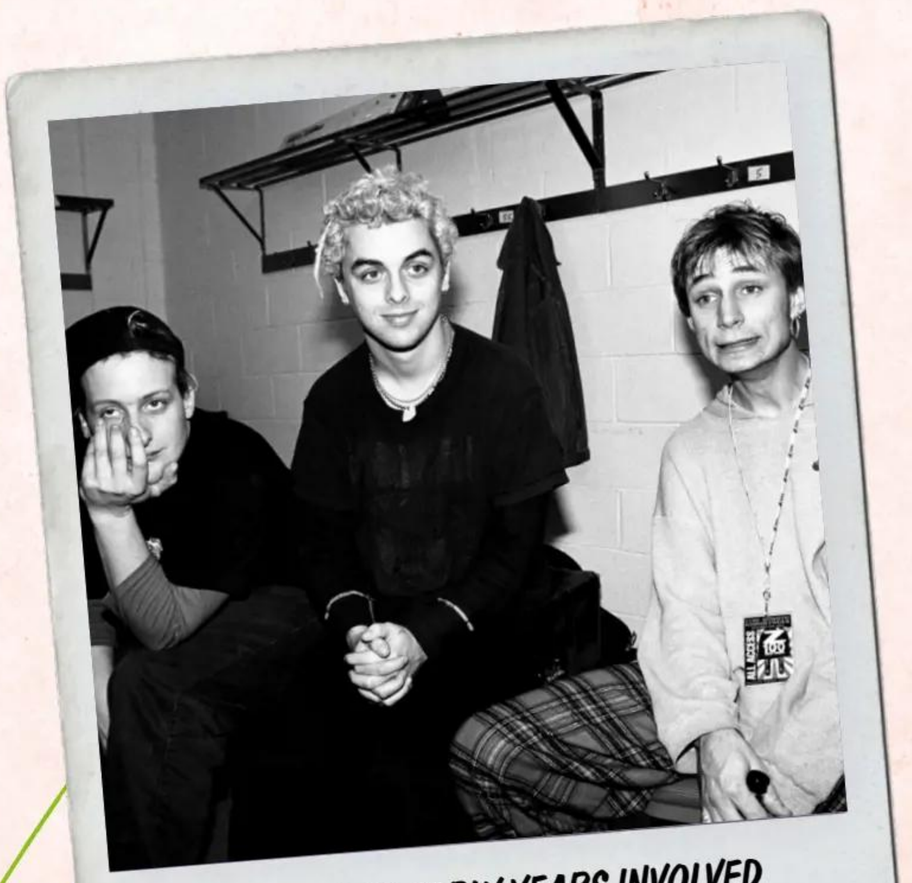
By now, Lookout! Records was doing well enough to be able to afford more studio time, so I told the band not to feel like they had to rush things. They did anyway; the album was done in three or four days and cost less than $2,000. Not bad for a record that would go on to sell more than a million copies.

I took the tape down to LA to have it mastered and made a cassette copy for myself. I popped it into my Walkman as my plane was taking off for the journey home. The first chords of '2,000 Light Years Away' kicked in, and it was so good it was almost scary. I knew instantly that life was never going to be the same again for Lookout! Records or Green Day.

We sold 10,000 copies of *Kerplunk* the day it came out, which might sound like nothing today, but for a tiny, underground label being run out of my equally tiny bedsit, it was amazing. By the end of 1992, it was up to 50,000. We were still flying under the industry radar, but not for much longer.

I was used to seeing Billie, Mike and Tré all the time, at gigs or hanging around the Lookout! 'office', but now they were touring so much, that was no longer the case. They repeatedly crisscrossed the US, Canada and Europe, first in an old van, then in the converted bookmobile Tré's dad fixed up and drove for them.

I was on tour with the Mr T Experience in Poland, not long after the communist government had fallen, and as we pulled into Bialystok, the last town ▶



GREEN DAY'S EARLY YEARS INVOLVED TOURING AROUND IN A CONVERTED BOOKMOBILE, DRIVEN BY TRÉ'S DAD

before the Russian border, I thought, "This has got to be the first time an American punk rock band has played in this part of the world." Then I saw the huge 'Green Day' spray-painted across the town's water tower. They'd been there, done that, months before us.

Back in Berkeley, I kept hearing rumours that the major labels were chasing Green Day. The next time I saw Tré, I asked him what was going on. He hummed and hawed, but I'd known him too long for him to be able to keep a secret. "We're talking to a management firm," he finally said, and when I rounded up Billie and Mike for a meeting in a nearby café, I found out they'd already signed a deal. I thought they'd be better off doing at least one more record on an indie label, but their minds were made up, and I wished them well.

They disappeared into the studio for the summer. Their first two albums combined had taken less than a week to record; they spent more time than that just setting up the drum sounds for *Dookie*. When it was done, they brought me an advance copy, and I was amazed. It was the same Green Day I'd always known and loved, only about 100 times better-produced. As good as the record was, though, I wasn't sure their new label would know what to do with it. The kind of music Green Day played was still a cult sound. I'd seen other great bands try to make the leap to the mainstream and get unceremoniously dumped if they didn't produce big sales right from the start.

But judging from the local shows Green Day played while waiting for *Dookie* to be released, that wasn't going to be a problem. They weren't just sold out; they were crawling with media and MTV types. Somehow the word was getting out, even before the record did.

Gilman Street has a rule that no band signed to a major label can play there, and even if that rule wasn't strictly enforced, the kind of crowds Green Day were now drawing could never fit into the 300-capacity warehouse. But at Christmas time, 1993, they played one last show there under a fake name.

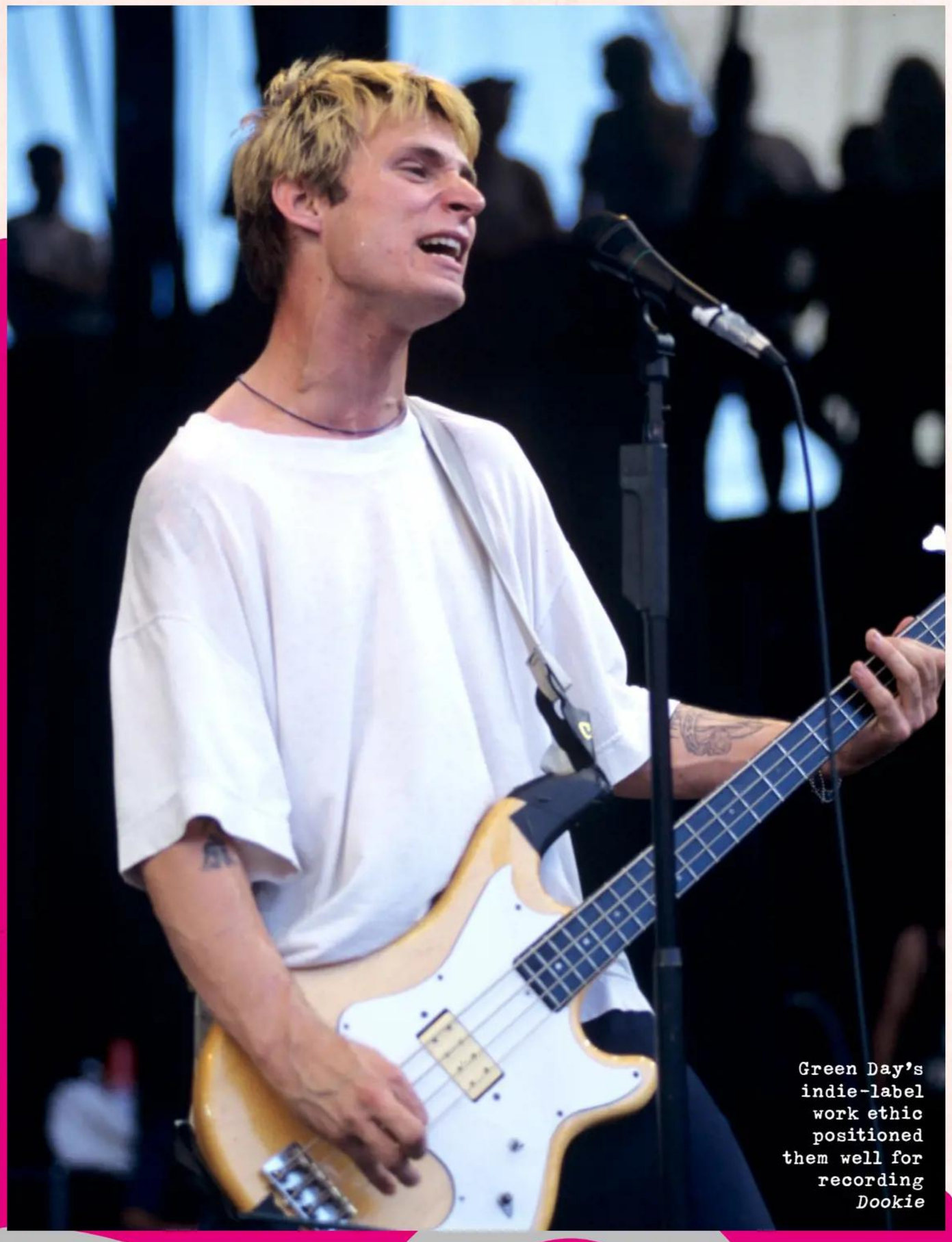
The club was only about half full, and almost everyone knew each other. We sang along with the band and danced and smiled bittersweet smiles, kind of like it was the senior prom, and we'd all soon be going our separate ways. Someone said to me, "I know Green Day are going to be huge, and I'm happy for them, but I'm sad, too, because our little scene is never going to be the same again."

A few weeks later, *Dookie* was out, and Green Day were off on a constant round of touring to promote it. It was all or nothing at that point; they didn't even have a home to come back to. As Billie put it, "I was sleeping on someone else's mattress. It was someone else's room. I put my clothes in a garbage bag, grabbed my guitar and my four-track, and I left."

I didn't see the guys again for a few months. I caught up with them in London, where they played a sold-out show at the Astoria. I hung out with them backstage, but the celebrities and TV lights were getting on my nerves, so I started walking home along the Bayswater Road. A bus pulled up alongside me, and someone yelled my name. Tré was hanging out the window, shouting, "What are you doing out there, doofus? Let's go party!" I jumped on the bus, and he showed me the video they'd just finished for their next single, 'Basket Case'.

Late that night, we ended up in a bar in Maida Vale. Green Day's manager had just flown over from the States, and he was waving a copy of the new *Billboard* magazine. Reprise had taken out a full-page ad that said simply "*Dookie* is Gold", in honour of the album having sold its first 500,000 copies.

It seemed like a long way from that freezing cabin on a remote Northern California mountainside, playing for five high-school kids by candlelight. But it wasn't really. The band that loved music so much that they'd play anywhere, any time, for anybody who would listen, hadn't really changed at all. They'd been superstars all along. The only difference was that now the whole world knew it. GD



Green Day's indie-label work ethic positioned them well for recording *Dookie*

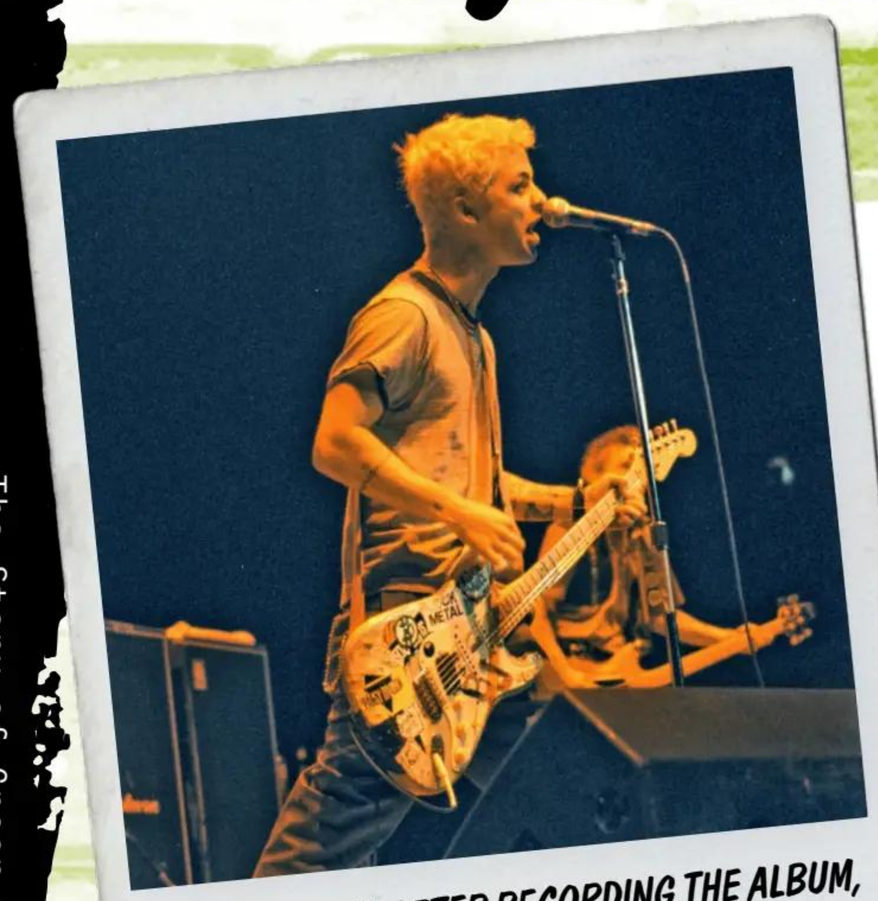
Once signed
with Reprise,
Green Day
were banned
from playing
Gilman Street

GREEN DAY SET OUT THEIR STALL ON THEIR RAW BUT PROMISING DEBUT RECORD

39/Smooth

1990, Lookout!

Words by Ian Winwood



A MONTH OR SO AFTER RECORDING THE ALBUM, BILLIE JOE DROPPED OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL TO FOCUS ON THE BAND

Anyone who proposes the notion that Green Day are not a proper punk rock band should be forced to study the history that surrounds their first album, *39/Smooth*.

Re-released in 1991 as *1,039/Smoothed Out Slappy Hours*, it's as punk rock as any US album recorded before the group exploded with *Dookie* in 1994. But, you see, this wasn't 1994. This was the dawn of the 1990s. A time before Nirvana's *Nevermind*, before Lollapalooza. A time when the biggest punk rock band were Bad Religion, who had recently sold 20,000 copies of an album called *Suffer*. This was what passed for commercial success back then.

"I look back at [*39/Smooth*]," said Billie Joe Armstrong, speaking in Dublin in 2004, "and I honestly think that we would have fucked it up had we had more time or more money to do it differently."

By any estimation, this release is a punk rock record. Whether you care to

mention Fugazi or NOFX, the ideas of independence and struggle were what Green Day's world was all about. As products of the Bay Area, they were familiar with its tradition of radicalism. You likely just read that the group were regulars at Gilman Street, the venue established in Berkeley by the editor of the punk rock organ *Maximumrocknroll*. Their record label, Lookout!, was founded by one Lawrence Livermore, leader of The Lookouts and a columnist for *Maximumrocknroll*. Lawrence lived a few hours north of the Bay; his neighbour was Tré Cool. Lawrence persuaded Tré to drum for The Lookouts when he was just 12. It was also Lawrence who suggested to Green Day that Tré was the ideal replacement for their original drummer – who left after the recording of this debut album – Al Sobrante.

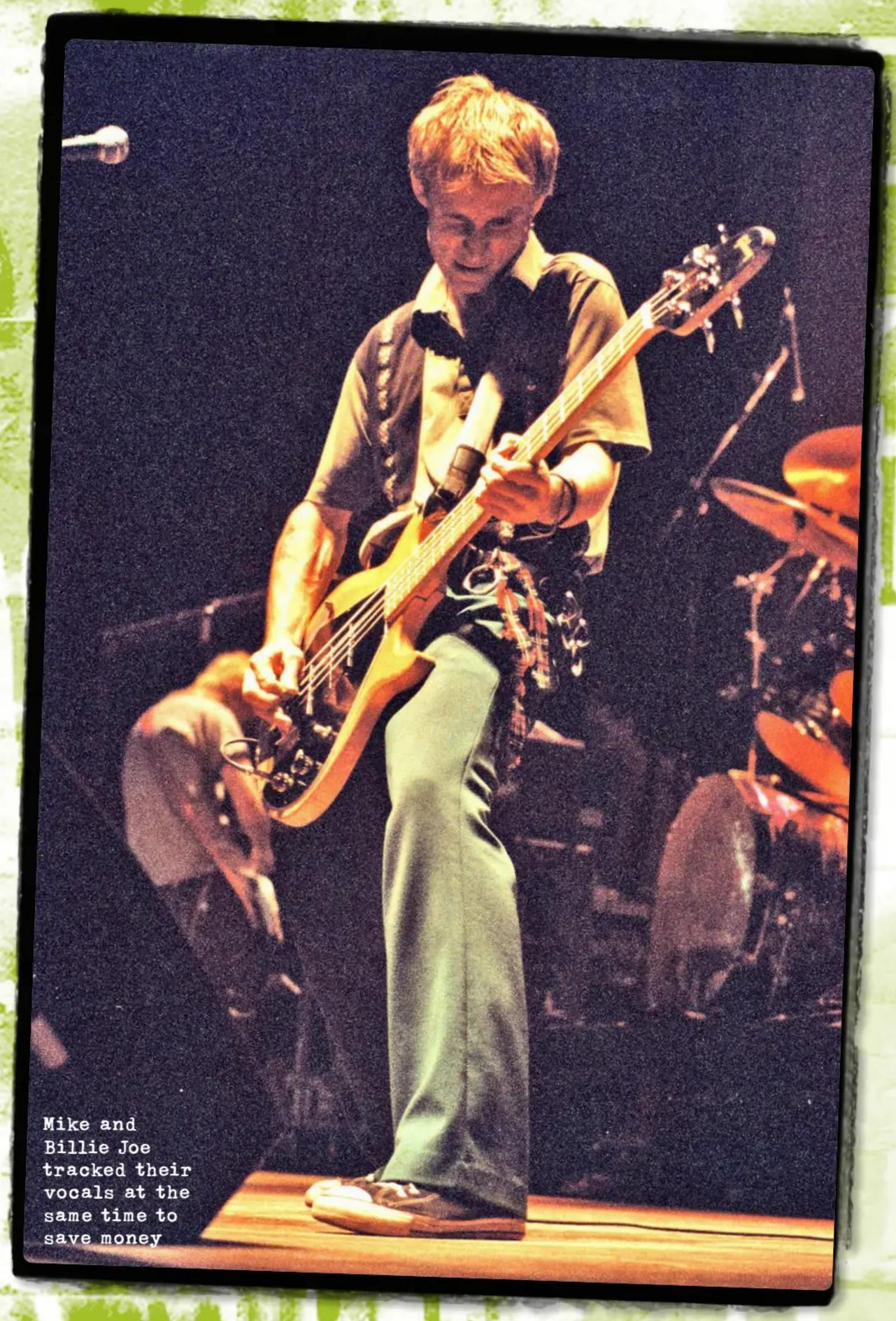
"Al also encouraged us to play with Tré," explained Mike in 2004. "We joked that it was a bit like saying, look, I'm not going to be around for a while, so why don't you fuck this other guy while I'm gone? He's much better in bed than me!"

But that was all to come. In 1989, Green Day were just a gang of children. They were 17 years old. They came from working-class backgrounds and were unremarkable except for one detail: the promise of their early material. The reputation of their live performances had already been secured in and around the Bay Area; now it was time for the band to place their first noises onto tape.

39/Smooth cost $650 to record. That bought them a day and a bit in the studio. The music was laid down in one day – often on a first take – and the vocals were laid down the day after. The group were used to working fast, to not messing around. It wasn't, for example, until they signed to a major label for *Dookie* that they even bought a guitar tuner.

What this meant was that on their first album, Green Day had nowhere to hide. There was no studio trickery – nothing to polish or embellish the sound. All *39/Smooth* had was its songs. Nothing more.

It is not, it should be said, a great album. It didn't create a legend in the way that, say, Metallica's *Kill 'Em All* did. It didn't come to be seen as an opening chapter of brilliance à la Nirvana's *Bleach*. It wasn't even the best punk rock debut from the Bay Area – nothing on it can match the Dead Kennedys' *Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables* or MDC's *Millions Of Dead Cops*.



Mike and Billie Joe tracked their vocals at the same time to save money

I HONESTLY THINK THAT WE WOULD HAVE FUCKED IT UP HAD WE HAD MORE TIME OR MORE MONEY

But what Green Day did manage was to flag up the potential they held at their disposal. *39/Smooth* is an album of songs that seem wise beyond their years, written by kids who were too young to legally drink and vote. It may have sounded tinny and hesitant, but the underground was placed on warning: something is happening here. By 1991, Green Day were playing to 1,000 people a night in some parts of the US. By 1994 they were the hottest group in the world.

The truth is, though, that there were a lot of bands releasing albums such as this in the 1990s. And it's only occasionally that Green Day display the kind of brilliance that would propel them into the stratosphere – on songs such as the quite superb 'Going To Pasalacqua', 'At The Library' or 'Road To Acceptance'.

The music here is best regarded as a point of reference, to appreciate how far the band have come. As a record, it's an interesting example of teenagers getting their kicks. But as the sound of a legacy at its beginnings… well, you would hardly know to listen to it. GD

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

GREEN DAY'S SECOND UNDERGROUND LP LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR MAINSTREAM SUCCESS

Kerplunk

Words by Shane Baldwin

1991, Lookout!

Green

Day's association with the Lookout! record label came about when the young Frank Edwin Wright III began to hang out with his neighbour, Lawrence Livermore of The Lookouts. The fledgling drummer began practising with Lawrence's band and eventually joined them, playing songs such as 'My Mom Smokes Pot'. Lawrence set up Lookout! Records for their first release, and Tré Cool – as Lawrence decided he should dub him – made his vinyl debut.

Tré became an in-demand drummer on the scene, playing with a variety of other local bands as well as The Lookouts, so it was only natural that when Green Day's original drummer Al Sobrante (real name John Kiffmeyer) left after the group's first album *39/Smooth* to attend college, Tré was duly recruited (with Lawrence's approval). He also penned the country-style song 'Dominated Love Slave' for *Kerplunk*.

With *39/Smooth* achieving healthy sales and Green Day gaining a larger following thanks to their relentless touring, Lookout! Records was enthused enough to entice the band back into the studio a second album, *Kerplunk*, released on 17 December 1991. As well as 'Dominated Love Slave', the album contained an early version of 'Welcome To Paradise'. Asked about the band's

BY KERPLUNK, TRÉ WAS A FULL MEMBER OF GREEN DAY AND WROTE THE SONG 'DOMINATED LOVE SLAVE' FOR THE ALBUM

Green Day's indie scene days were numbered, and *Dookie* was right around the corner

decision to re-record the song for *Dookie* in 1994, Mike Dirnt said, "There's a bunch of songs on *Kerplunk* that we only knew for about a week, literally, before we went on to record them… That song, in particular, we felt we wanted to represent as a really strong song. In the *Kerplunk* version, there's a lot of spooky stuff going on in the middle… We just wanted to show it as a solid song."

To these ears, there's not much wrong with the original version of 'Welcome To Paradise' – the *Dookie* take just being, understandably, a little smoother in places, but that's merely one more argument for fans to bicker about online. What isn't open to debate is that despite the low budget and the limited studio time available to the band, by the time Green Day recorded *Kerplunk*, in terms of songwriting, musical ability and attitude, they had everything in place for the next step. And even under these conditions, the trio was still able to deliver an album with multilayered backing vocals, intricate guitars and crisp, if sometimes muted, drums.

'2,000 Light Years Away', with its hints of Stiff Little Fingers at their most melodic, is still a fan favourite, and the track that proudly opens the 2017 compilation *Greatest Hits: God's Favorite Band*. 'One For The Razorbacks' is no slouch either, but after the aforementioned 'Welcome To Paradise', the pace slackens for 'Christie Road', a poignant (even then) ode to Billie Joe Armstrong's early years.

'Private Ale' is fairly unremarkable, apart from the shrieking scream before the middle section, and then we get Tré's 'Dominated Love Slave', the lyrics of which prove that in addition to doing them proud on the drums, the man was well up to the Green Day mark in the bizarre-state-of-mind stakes.

'One Of My Lies' is a decent pop-punk workout, but '80' is much more satisfying thanks to Billie Joe's soaring vocals and punchy backing from Tré and Mike, though the fade-out is a touch disappointing. Another SLF-style riff permeates 'Android', a tale of teenage drug use apparently set in the past tense before the dreamy and ethereal 'No One Knows'.

'Who Wrote Holden Caulfield' is a taut, jerky song lifted with nice backing vocal harmonies, and then we come to 'Word I Might Have Ate', a pacy, acoustic, 1960s-influenced number. At first, Billie Joe's vocals here seem to have come from a Monkees album, though he later eases into his own persona.

So ends the vinyl version of *Kerplunk*. For the CD, the four tracks from the '*Sweet Children*' EP (on the Skene! label) were also included; namely, the title song, 'Best Thing In Town', 'Strangeland' and a cover of The Who's 'My Generation'. Compared to the rest of the album, these tracks sound a little crude, but still, it's nice to hear these very early incarnations of the Green Day sound.

Kerplunk was a loud affirmation that Green Day was here to stay, and it became a major winner for Lookout!, selling 10,000 copies on its first day. The days as an underground punk outfit were coming to an end, however. Major labels started to smell blood in the water and were closing in on the fledgling trio as they were making waves across the country touring *Kerplunk* in a decked-out bookmobile. And with two albums under their belt, Green Day were ready to take it to the next level. GD

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

HOW GREEN DAY FIRST TASTED MAJOR SUCCESS – AND THEN SOME – WITH REPRISE

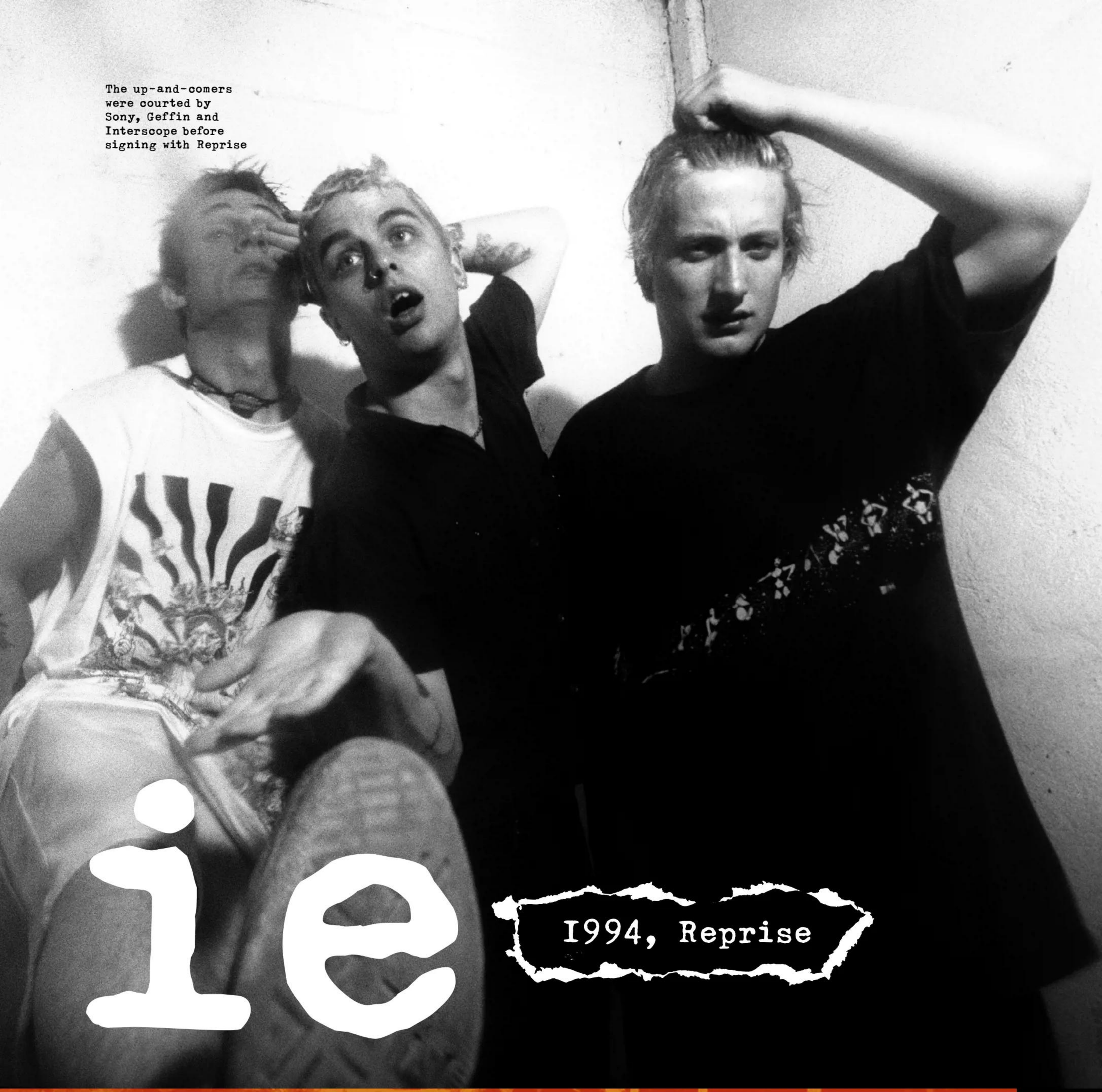
Dook

Words by Darren James

By 1993, Green Day were already a pretty successful band by anyone's standards, with the *1,039/Smoothed Out Slappy Hours* compilation and the *Kerplunk* album having shifted more than 30,000 copies each, gaining them a rapidly expanding live following.

In fact, they'd probably achieved as much as any band in the punk arena could reasonably expect to. Fortunately, however, Nirvana had just rewritten the rules, turning the music world on its head with their globe-straddling album *Nevermind*. Like Green Day, Nirvana started out on a modest indie label – in their case, Sub Pop – and caused howls of indignation among fans when they signed to a major (Geffen). Yet the success of *Nevermind* opened the floodgates for any potentially chart-friendly chancers with a snappy tune and a punk sensibility.

Green Day's rise to stardom began when, after years of looking after their own affairs, they were picked up by managers Elliot Cahn and Jeff Saltzman (who already had Mudhoney, Melvins and Primus on their books). It's not clear



whether a firm decision had been made to sign the band to a major at this stage, as Epitaph were among the labels they approached with a new demo – and were apparently keen to work with them – but as the other contenders included Geffen and Sony, it seemed likely.

What is certain is that by this time, the members of Green Day had developed a canny business sense, along with a belief in their own abilities. They insisted that whatever label they went for, they were to have total artistic control – something promised to many artists down the years, punk or otherwise, but rarely achieved.

Naturally, the band took their time, holding out for the best offer, but the turning point came when Rob Cavallo (the son of Prince/Alanis Morissette manager Bob Cavallo) received a copy of the demo and headed out to Berkeley in 1993 to meet the members. Rob was an A&R man and producer for major label Reprise/Warners, set up by Frank Sinatra many years before, and latterly home to the likes of Mudhoney. He once revealed, "I'll never forget when Green Day said to me – it was so cool – they said, 'We're going to be a great band.' And they knew it. 'We're going to be a great band no matter what Reprise does for us.' They already could draw 1,000 kids in a good ten or 12 cities across this country, and they'd already played Europe. These kids were 21 years old. They knew what it took to be successful in the music business. They never had jobs. They made their living by being a band by the time they were age 16 or 17."

WE GOT A LOT OF GRAP, AND STILL GETTING IT, FOR SIGNING WITH A MAJOR LABEL – SO WHAT?

As Bob said, in addition to the quality of their early releases, the band's status by this stage was built on gruelling tours of the underground punk circuit, covering both the US and Europe thanks to budget-priced flights. Green Day had played small clubs in UK glamour spots such as Wigan and Newport and squats in Germany, all off their own backs.

In the States, like several of their contemporaries, they played many shows at the legendary 924 Gilman Street club in the Bay Area of San Francisco (rewind to page 32 if you need a refresher). Seeing the way the club was operated also showed them something that listening to records back home couldn't: the ideas and principles by which the US underground scene was run. These could sometimes be strict in the extreme, as many transgressors found to their cost, but the sense of empowerment and belonging was potent and far-reaching.

Given all that experience, once Green Day had taken the decision to sign with a major label, you might think they would have seen what was coming from some quarters – but like others before them, it seems they were a little taken aback by the ferocity of the resultant backlash. If not exactly hurt by the reaction from their friends in the underground to the news that they'd signed with Reprise, the band were still a little mystified. They've revealed that on visiting Gilman Street after the release of the debut Reprise album, they met with a frosty reception, with one former pal asking, "What the hell are you guys doing here?"

Mike Dirnt said at the time, "You know, every band who sold records is getting branded with the sell-out label, especially from fans who liked them in their early, unsuccessful days. They think they've found something, they identify with you because you're underdogs, and then you make it, and they hate you. They feel you've betrayed them because now others like you, too. We didn't start the band to cash in a lot of money. When we started out, punk was probably the most unpopular music around."

Quite true, although Billie Joe felt the Gilman Street rejection: "We've played

Tré and Mike stealing seats at the 1994 MTV VMAs

A re-recorded version of *Kerplunk* favourite 'Welcome to Paradise' made it onto *Dookie*'s tracklist

in front of 2,000 and 3,000 people, and I still haven't felt the same thing that I felt playing that place. There are bad shows I've had there that I'll remember for the rest of my life, and there are the greatest shows I've ever played."

He continued, more defensively, "Punk is not just the sound, the music: punk is a lifestyle. There are a lot of bands around that claim to be punk and they only play the music – they have no clue what it's all about. It's a lifestyle I choose for myself. It's not about popularity and all that crap. When we started out as a band, we played punk rock, the music. [Then] we developed, we changed our sound – but we didn't change. We're just as punk as we used to be. We got a lot of crap, and we're still getting it, for being signed with a major label – so what?"

Even with a major-label budget at their disposal, the band's now deeply ingrained work ethic ensured that the 17 tracks that were laid down for the *Dookie* session were recorded over just 19 days – working 12 hours a day – at Fantasy Studio in Berkeley. The title is US slang for turd, and was slimmed down from the original concept of 'Liquid Dookie' on the grounds that it was "too gross".

Released on 1 February 1994, the album entered the *Billboard* chart at a modest 141, but soon picked up momentum with the success of 'Longview', the first single. This was aided in no small part by its chaotic accompanying video, which was shot in the basement of Billie Joe and Tré's apartment on Ashby and Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley. It gained plenty of airplay on MTV, and 'Longview' was soon heading up the chart, going on to reach number three on *Billboard*'s end-of-year Modern Rock listing.

The album's second single, 'Basket Case', went to number one on the *Billboard* rock chart in August, beginning a five-week residence, and was also the first Green Day single to hit the UK chart, peaking at number 55 in the same month and number seven on reissue. Its video was another belter, nominated for MTV's Best Video Of The Year award.

The third single, 'Welcome To Paradise', was Green Day's most successful release in the UK at the time, hitting number 20. This was followed in early 1995 by 'When I Come Around', which spent seven weeks at the top of the chart.

Dookie was a bona fide phenomenon. US sales reached 10 million, with ▶

Despite signing to a major label, the boys kept their punk mentality

The story goes that Bille Joe lay down his vocals to tape in just two days

worldwide sales hitting an amazing 20 million by 2014, and the album picked up a Grammy for Best Alternative Music Performance. After a year on the chart, in February 1995, it was still at number two. With its great songs, and the backing of a major label and MTV, it was perhaps inevitable that *Dookie* would be huge – but there was one other important factor in its elevation (and that of Green Day) to such dizzy heights, and that was the ill-fated Woodstock '94 festival. To many, it seemed a ludicrous idea from the start: resurrecting a festival that, despite the mythology surrounding it, was not only an organisational disaster in itself but also built on long-outmoded ideals. As it turned out, Woodstock '94 was nothing like the first one – it was much worse.

Held over the weekend of 12 to 14 August 1994 at Winston Farm in upstate New York, Woodstock '94 was strictly a money deal, with punters paying $135 for entrance and appalling facilities, while Metallica copped $2 million for a 90-minute set. Then there was the rain, which pelted down for the whole weekend, reducing the entire festival site to an apocalyptic quagmire and the tolerance levels of the 250,000 attendees dropped to zero.

Enter Green Day. At the time of the festival, *Dookie* had just picked up a gold disc for sales of over 500,000 units, so naturally, their spirits were high when they took to the stage at 3pm. However, opening with 'Welcome To Paradise' was either taking the piss or just unwise (we know which our money is on). People had been chanting for the band during the acts that preceded them, so it's not as if they weren't among friends, but when a few fans chucked mud at the stage, Billie Joe and Mike began goading the crowd to hurl more. With the stage now almost as much of a mess as the rest of the site, Billie Joe removed his trousers, though whether it was this that provoked fans to begin attempting to invade the stage is unclear. In the chaos, Mike lost some teeth when a member of the security crew knocked him into a monitor, believing him to be a member of the audience.

To say that the organisers were unimpressed would be a vast understatement. Their set cut short, Green Day were ushered from the stage. The resulting publicity, including blanket TV news coverage, was all that was needed to give them the final push from big-band status to that of the biggest punk band in the world. GD

THE BAND INSISTED THAT WHATEVER LABEL THEY WENT FOR, THEY WERE TO HAVE TOTAL ARTISTIC CONTROL

No prizes for guessing the riff here

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

Freak Out!

FREAK OUT!!

How 'Basket Case' became a Green Day staple, and why that pissed the group off

Words by Henry Yates

Before

the release of *Dookie* put him on the rock-star treadmill of tour bus bunks and five-star hotels, Billie Joe Armstrong lived in the basement of a dilapidated student house in the Californian college town of Berkeley. The basement wasn't just where Billie Joe ate, slept and smoked. Rather, this was the Green Day headquarters: the base from which the band fielded calls from record labels, and where they rehearsed their set and recovered from their touring schedule. It was also where Billie Joe wrote 'Basket Case' on his blue Stratocaster.

Like the other tracks on *Dookie*, 'Basket Case' was recorded in Fantasy Studios in Berkeley, with Rob Cavallo on production. There's little to suggest that Green Day considered the song any stronger than the other potential hits on *Dookie*, and no evidence that they knew just what a phenomenon it would become. If they had, some suspect they might never have recorded it.

'Basket Case' was not an overnight success. It didn't – as media sensationalists would have you believe – pogo its way into the punk history books

The track stands proud as Green Day's most-streamed song on Spotify

The video was shot in an actual mental institution in California

without breaking a sweat. On release, the single stalled at number 55 in the UK chart before nosediving into oblivion. It was the asylum-themed video's heavy rotation on MTV and Green Day's anarchic performance at Woodstock 1994 that finally saw 'Basket Case' reach its slacker demographic. With momentum gathering, the band reissued the single in the UK (where it hit number 13 in February 1995) and planted a firm foothold with an incendiary set at that summer's Reading Festival. Both sides of the Atlantic were now dancing its tune.

But to dismiss the impact of 'Basket Case' as the result of a marketing campaign is to miss the point. It was the perfect punk anthem: a three-chord thrash that could be approximated by any covers band and burnt out as fast as it had reared up. "It got to the point where I wasn't even singing the lyrics any more," Billie Joe told VH1 of audiences' reaction to the song. "People were just doing it on their own."

The song also saw a greater complexity creeping into Billie Joe's lyrics. "Sometimes I give myself the creeps/Sometimes my mind plays tricks on me," he yelps in the chorus. "It all keeps adding up/I think I'm cracking up…" The concept of alienation from the world was a staple theme in punk, but Billie Joe actually meant it. Like Mike Dirnt, the singer was prone to panic attacks and anxiety, the symptoms of which were often so extreme that he feared he was losing the plot. "'Basket Case' is about anxiety attacks and feeling like you're ready to go crazy," he later explained. "At times I probably was. I've suffered from panic disorders my entire life. I thought I was just losing my mind. The only way I could know what the hell was going on was to write a song about it."

Things got even more tangled in the second verse, with Billie Joe's inversion of genders leading to chat room speculation that this was a confession of his bisexuality. "I went to a shrink to analyse my dreams/She says it's lack of sex that's bringing me down," he begins, before prompting countless scratched heads in the pit with his next line: "I went to a whore/He said my life's a bore/And quit my whining cause it's bringing her down."

Even through the haze of platinum sales, the trio must have seen the backlash coming. Until 'Basket Case', Green Day were a modestly successful band, that followed punk's dogma to the letter. Now they were playing arena tours to punters who drank, fought and left after 'Basket Case'. "When it came out, we had no control over who liked it," recalled Tré Cool. "We had a bunch of super-fivin' marines going, 'Yeah, cool, you're my favourite fuckin' band, bro!' You have no control, so you just go, 'Oh, great, whatever'. We were playing too many Coliseum-style shows. All these ice rinks around Europe, the US and Canada – it gets impersonal after a while. It became like, 'OK, let's play 'Basket Case' again.'"

These days, the band say they enjoy playing 'Basket Case'. Perhaps this is because their 2000s success took the pressure off in the singalong stakes. Or maybe Green Day have finally accepted that it's an amazing song that makes crowds go apeshit. Three decades down the line, we still have the time to listen to Billie Joe whine… GD

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

RAFFY

TRÉ, BILLIE JOE AND MIKE IN LATE 1994, CHILLING OUT BACKSTAGE BEFORE A GIG AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAIN-STREAM

1995-1999

Like many before them, the mid-1990s found Green Day struggling to reconcile mainstream success with their defiant grassroots ethos

Words by Neil Crossley

The music industry is littered with instances of bands who've been accused of selling out after signing a deal with a major label.

Such was the case with Green Day. After building up a substantial grassroots fanbase with Larry Livermore's Lookout! Records, there was a major-label feeding frenzy. The band signed with the Warner-owned Reprise in 1993, and almost overnight incurred the wrath of hardcore fans in the Bay Area punk scene. They played their final show at their beloved 924 Gilman Street venue under the pseudonym Blair Hess in September 1993, before being banned for life for taking the corporate dollar.

In February 1994, they released their major label debut album, *Dookie*. Recorded in just three weeks at Fantasy Studios in Berkley, the album was a colossal commercial success, going on to sell 10 million copies in the US alone, winning a Grammy Award for Best Alternative Album and being nominated for nine MTV video awards.

In an interview with *Rolling Stone* in 2019, Billie Joe Armstrong reflected on the impact of *Dookie*'s landmark success back in 1994. "I remember being pretty freaked out. I was playing a kind of music that had never been on that kind of scale before… I didn't really stop and smell the

roses. Later on, I was kind of like, 'Did I enjoy myself enough? Was that fun?'"

The cartoon imagery on the cover of *Dookie* belied the band's darker roots, their disaffection and fierce DIY ethic. Back on their home turf of East Bay, after the release of *Dookie*, they began to experience real hostility.

In an interview with *Kerrang!* in 2001, Billie Joe Armstrong recalled being accosted by a stranger in the Haight-Ashbury area of San Francisco, who hurled insults and accused him of being a sell-out. "I remember I almost got into a fight with him," the singer recalled. "I was, like, 'What the fuck do you know about me, or my band?'"

Such reactions would fuel the creation of the song '86', on the band's follow-up album *Insomniac*. That album boasted a much heavier, hardcore punk sound with darker, bleaker lyrics than its predecessor. Alienation, boredom and addiction were prevailing lyrical themes.

Still stung by the rejection from the core diehard punk scene from which they had emerged, Green Day set out on this album to prove their detractors wrong. "I felt at the time that there was a real urgency to what we were doing," bassist Mike Dirnt told *Kerrang!* in 2019. "There was a real urgency to stake our claim and say, 'No, we belong here.'"

In complete contrast to the lo-fi DIY ethos of punk, the band and producer Rob Cavallo set out to achieve the best sound they could on *Insomniac*, lining up walls of amps to select the best guitar sound and recording the takes in

short-sharp bursts, drinking heaps of coffee to help attain the best live take. By then, the band's personal lives were changing as they married and started families. Drummer Tré Cool and his wife had a daughter, which had a noticeable impact on his playing.

"I can hit the drums harder than I ever thought I could," he told Jann Wenner of *Rolling Stone*. "Having a kid is trying – you have to watch your temper all the time – but it enhances the experience of playing in the band."

Released on 10 October 1995, the album didn't match the sales of *Dookie*, coming in at three million. Critically, some journalists bemoaned the lack of artistic development. "They kept the blueprint and made it a shade darker," noted *AllMusic*. However, the music press overall championed *Insomniac*. Ian Winwood of *Kerrang!* wrote that the album was a "masterclass in buzzsaw efficiency, the songs are so economical, not to mention harsh, that the removal of even a single chord would cause each composition to collapse in on itself". He concluded that this was the album on which "its creators lost their baby teeth".

The album reached number two on the US *Billboard* 200 chart and number eight on the UK Album Charts. By then, Green Day were a ferocious live outfit, with heaps of attitude and aggression, and they embarked on an extensive world tour to promote *Insomniac*. But the trio had become increasingly uneasy about the level of stardom they had attained. "We were becoming the things we hated, playing those big arenas," recalled Billie Joe Armstrong. "It was beginning to be not fun anymore."

After a break writing at home, Green Day came back more confident than ever

'HITCHIN' A RIDE' B-SIDE 'ESPIONAGE' MADE IT ONTO THE SOUNDTRACK FOR AUSTIN POWERS: THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME

They were also all becoming homesick as touring forced them to leave their families. Something had to give. The band eventually decided to cancel the last stage of the European leg of their tour and took a short break to recuperate with their families and friends at home.

But the trio didn't exactly stop and continued to write music, amassing over 30 new songs and regrouping with Rob Cavallo to discuss their next album. From March to July 1997, they recorded these new tracks at Conway Studios in Los Angeles, booking themselves into the Sunset Marquis Hotel. They selected 18 tracks for the new album, which would be called *Nimrod*.

From the outset, Rob Cavallo and the band agreed that this should be distinctly different from previous releases. The result was a more experimental album, far removed from the three-chord structures and their brand of soaring high-energy punk-pop.

Billie Joe Armstrong looked to the broad sonic boundaries of The Clash's 1979 album *London Calling* for his inspiration. What evolved was an album that spanned punk, pop, hardcore, folk, ska and acoustic balladry. "Each song has its own character and identity, so we wanted to be able to bring that out as much as possible," he told *The Boston Globe* in 1997.

Nimrod reached number ten on the US *Billboard* 200 charts and most critics acknowledged that the band had made a conscious effort to move out of their sonic comfort zone. Sandy Masuo in the *Los Angeles Times* commended the "mature songwriting that really makes this album tick". And for all its sonic diversity, critics noted that the band's strong melodic sensibilities remained intact.

The album contained one of the group's strongest ever singles, 'Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life)', an acoustic guitar-driven ballad, with lush strings and an open widescreen sound. The song was a mainstream success and went on to become one of their most popular songs and a staple of their live set – turn to page 62 for more on that.

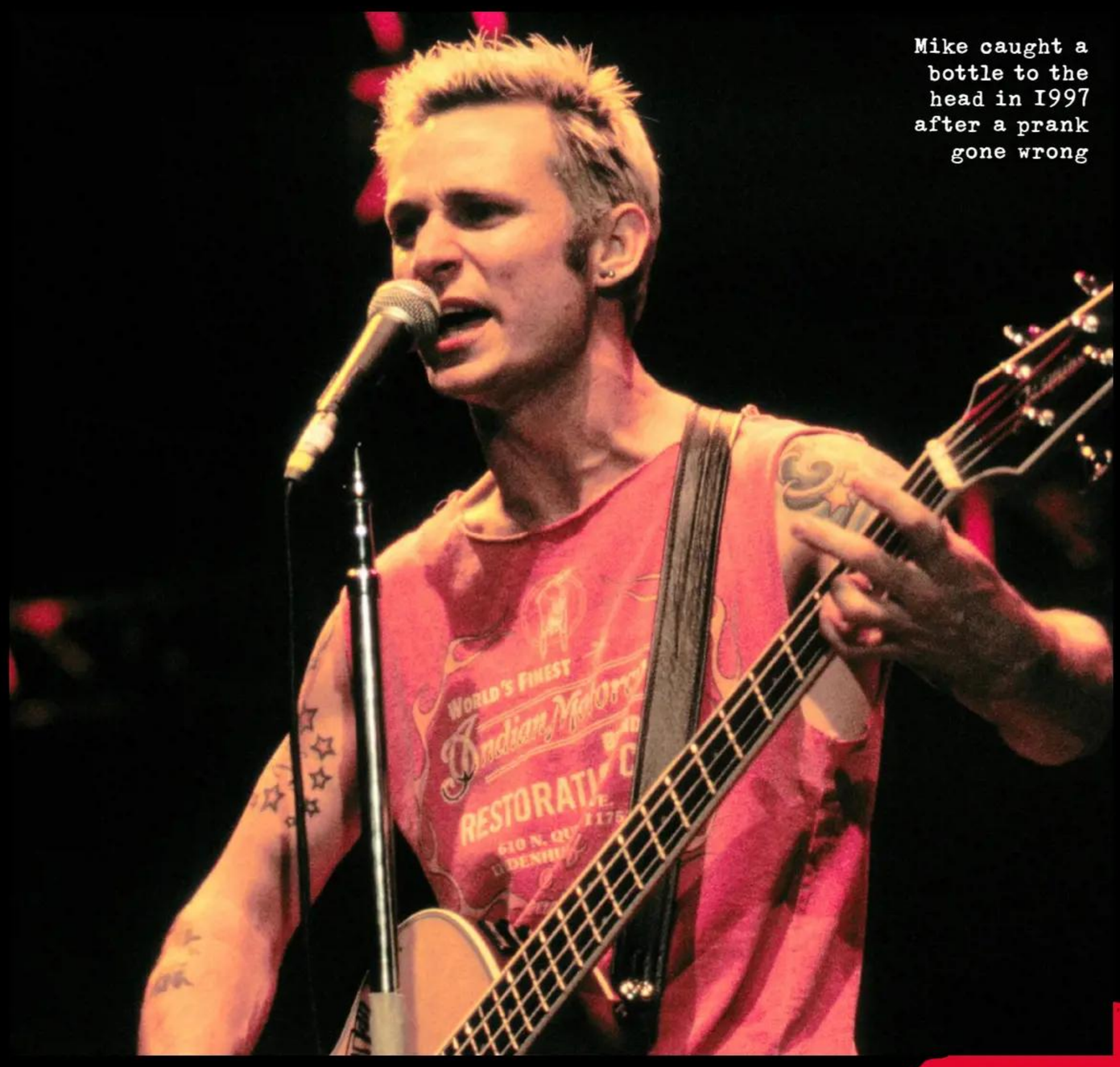
The album's promotion did not start well. At a Tower Records show in Manhattan on 11 November 1997, the band were upset over remarks that they had lost their punk edge and allegedly started a riot. "Green Day trash N.Y. Tower Records Store" ran a headline on *MTV News*, which stated that Billie Joe Armstrong said, "You can start a riot … it's your prerogative, you can do anything you want because you're not at Tower Records, you're at a Green Day concert.'"

Despite the broader instrumentation on the album, the band kept things minimal on stage, playing smaller theatres on a tour that marked the first time the band performed their now-routine ritual of inviting audience members onstage to play instruments. Billie Joe said later that he felt he had become a much better performer. "I think some people walk away from a Green Day concert with the emotions you would get from some kind of theatre performance where the crowd feels involved – where it's not just about the singer. It's not just about the band."

The tour was not without controversy, though. During a performance at the 1998 KROQ Weenie Roast in Irvine California, Third Eye Blind bassist Arion Salazar rushed on stage and bear-hugged Mike Dirnt, which led to an onstage scuffle and a beer bottle striking Mike in the head and causing a small fracture to his skull. Eyewitnesses confirmed the bottle had been thrown by a Third Eye Blind fan. Arion and the band's management issued a heartfelt apology to Mike.

By 1998, 'Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life)' was broadening the band's market after being used in the medical drama *ER* and the series finale of the revered sitcom, *Seinfeld*. In one fell swoop, Green Day were seeping into the collective consciousness of the nation.

In 1999, Green Day's ranks swelled by the inclusion of Jason White as a touring guitarist, which opened up new sonic vistas in the live arena. The unease over their colossal success still seemed to haunt them. But as the new millennium beckoned, their creative and commercial future looked assured. GD



Mike caught a bottle to the head in 1997 after a prank gone wrong

Nimrod brought acoustic instruments to Green Day shows

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

HOW GREEN DAY STRETCHED OUT TO WAIT...

1995, Reprise

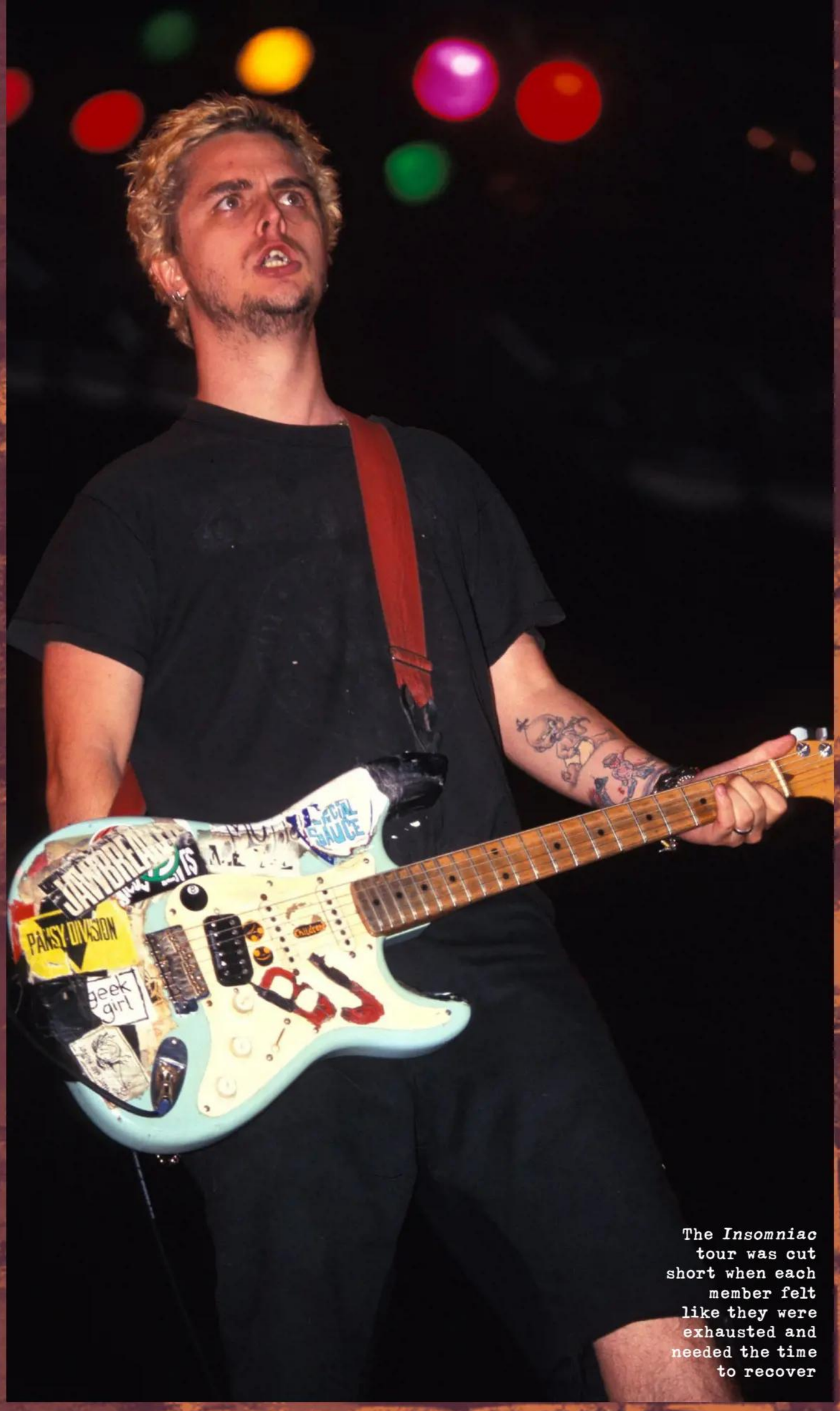
Insomniac

Green Day followed up on *Dookie* with *Insomniac*, released on 10 October 1995 – although earlier in the year, the group scored another *Billboard Modern Rock* chart number one with the single 'J.A.R.' from the soundtrack to the summer coming-of-age comedy movie *Angus*.

Like Green Day's previous record, *Insomniac* was produced by Rob Cavallo and the band themselves, and mixed by Jerry Finn; however, this time, the sound was more sombre. Lyrically, the album was just the wrong side of depressing, although, of course, especially with early Green Day, it's hard to decide when, if ever, they're fully committing to a serious tone.

Opening track 'Armatage Shanks' had no apparent chorus, containing lines such as, "I must insist/On being a pessimist/I'm a loner with a catastrophic mind", while the second track 'Brat', with the lines, "I'll just

GREEN DAY WERE STUNG BY FEELINGS OF REJECTION FROM THEIR PUNK PEERS, PROMPTING THE DARKER TONE OF INSOMNIAC



The *Insomniac* tour was cut short when each member felt like they were exhausted and needed the time to recover

wait for mom and dad to die/And get my inheritance", was more obviously fictitious in its storytelling.

Musically, 'Stuck With Me' was a little more upbeat, but not much, although the powerfully succinct middle eight, with a virtuoso bassline from Mike, gave the track a great lift, and Billie Joe's chorus (possibly talking about the band's exclusion from the underground scene) sounded fun so long as you didn't examine the lyrics: "Cast out… buried in a hole/Struck down… forcing me to fall/ Destroyed… giving up the fight/Well I know I'm not all right."

'Geek Stink Breath', a chugging little tale of an amphetamine addict, despite being somewhat less than chirpy, became the album's first single, but 'No Pride' was more punchy, thanks in no small part to Tré's scintillating drums. The curiously titled 'Bab's Uvula Who?' was a tautly executed number, while '86' was another tale of an old punk now excluded from the scene, though whether or not it's autobiographical is unclear.

'Panic Song' – with lyrics from both Mike and Billie Joe –is yet another claustrophobically bleak track, and there are precious few laughs to be found on 'Stuart And The Ave'. It's something of a relief when 'Brain Stew', the album's second single, heaves into view. Okay, it's not exactly a laugh-a-minute, either, but at least after the staccato verses, it loosens up with a dense instrumental, before segueing into the speedy workout 'Jaded'.

None of the album's singles ('Geek Stink Breath', 'Stuck With Me' or radio favourite 'Brain Stew' / 'Jaded' hit the chart, but *Insomniac* itself was well-received by fans and critics alike, and the omens looked good when it entered the US chart at number two. By the spring of 1996, *Insomniac* had shifted over two million copies – a resounding result for most bands, but not when following a triumph such as *Dookie*.

And really, that's the main reason why *Insomniac* is rarely counted among Green Day fans' favourite albums. If it didn't quite hit the spot at the time, with hindsight, it was essential for the band's long-term career that they didn't merely produce a second *Dookie* – and it was clear that the album was a conscious attempt to sidestep the media's perception of Green Day as a cartoon punk band, and deliver something with a more corrosive edge. The record was housed in an exquisite collage called *God Told Me to Skin You Alive* by artist and illustrator Winston Smith, a darkly chaotic jumble of images that reflected the content of *Insomniac* perfectly.

The band hit the road to promote the album, but eventually ran into trouble when the European leg of the tour was abruptly cancelled. The official reason was "exhaustion", but Billie Joe later gave a fuller explanation: "We were exhausted, wrecked – absolutely wrecked. At that point in time, we had been on tour for over two years, and slowly our fuses blew. One after another, just went bang! We were finished, fucked up. We didn't know who we were, or where we were. We just wanted to go home."

They did just that, and little more was heard from Green Day for quite a while. But it seems likely that this burn-out period was more a delayed reaction to the sudden escalation in the band's fortunes following *Dookie* and the air of uncomfortableness the group felt towards their new widespread fame, than the result of the sales of *Insomniac*, of which Tré later said: "The album was very aggressive. It kicks you right in the balls."

Green Day regrouped and got over their homesickness by returning to familiar ground, however they didn't exactly rest. Never a group to sit still, Billie Joe, Mike and Tré went back to the drawing board, and it wasn't long before they were once again in the studio. GD

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

HORNS AND VIOLINS PROVIDE THE BACKDROP TO GREEN DAY'S MOST MATURE RECORD TO DATE

Nimrod

1997, Reprise

After they canceled their spring 1996 European tour in support of *Insomniac*, Green Day took a step back to rest, consider their options, and write and record a new album.

During their recuperation period, it's said Billie Joe, Mike and Tré wrote over 30 songs for the new record. Rob Cavallo was again in the producer's seat, along with the band themselves, though for *Nimrod*, Green Day's third album for Reprise, the mix was by Chris Lord-Alge, who replaced Jerry Finn, who'd done the honours on *Dookie* and *Insomniac*.

The break seemed to have done the band good, with many fans at the time proclaiming *Nimrod* as their best album to date, and though that may have been overstating the case a little, it was certainly a return to form. Typically pessimistic in sentiment, musically *Nimrod* was a pulsating effort and contains many songs that are still fan favourites today.

"We knew we wanted to record a different album and not another version of *Insomniac*," said Billie Joe. "If we couldn't take the challenge, we'd end up like some old punk rockers, playing the same stuff over and over. I don't want to mention names, but the guys will know who we're talking about. A fate worse than death." As for the album's title. "It's some guy from the Old Testament. But for some strange reason, it turned into a curse. It's another name for dork."

After a long wait, the album was finally released on 14 October 1997, and was greeted with enthusiasm by critics

and fans alike, selling 80,000 copies in its first week, taking it to number ten on the *Billboard* Modern Rock chart, number four on the Canadian chart, and number 11 in the UK.

The first single from the album was 'Hitchin' A Ride' – not, at first, an obvious choice as it's an initially plodding number, but Tré's military drum beat thrusts the verses along, building up to giant choruses. The song culminates in a swirling, squalling finale. With heavy rotation on both Much Music and MTV, the single went to the number-five spot.

The second single, however, was one of those comparatively rare songs that take a band out of the narrow confines of the music business and into the wider arena. While your granny may never have heard of Green Day, she has probably heard 'Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life)'.

Powerful and punchy it may have been, but *Nimrod* was also the first Green Day album to fully utilise acoustic instruments. There are horns on 'King For A Day' and violins on 'Hitchin' A Ride' and 'Last Ride In'. This more experimental approach (which would reappear later on '*Warning*'), came to the fore on 'Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life)'. Featuring just Billie Joe on vocals and acoustic guitar, backed with more strings, this touching (and out of character) ballad quickly became one of Green Day's best-known songs, used many times over the years whenever TV producers want to pluck viewers' heartstrings, most notably for the final season of the risible but hugely popular sitcom *Seinfeld*. It's also long provided a lighters-in-the-air moment in the band's live shows. The album's third single was 'Redundant', another slow number and a poignant tale of a faded relationship with nicely lilting vocals and twangy 1960s-style guitars.

Perhaps fearing they were losing touch with their punk rock roots with all this newly acquired maturity of direction, Green Day caused chaos during an in-store promotional performance in Broadway's Tower Records. Pointing out to the crowd that, "You can start a riot!" Billie Joe went on to say: "It's your prerogative – you can do anything you want, 'cos you're not at Tower Records, you're at a Green Day concert." During the 45-minute set, Bille Joe crowd-surfed to the window to spray-paint 'Fuck You' on it, mooned to the punters outside, poured water and beer over record racks, spray-painted *Nimrod* over the walls, and was eventually restrained by a store manager when attempting to throw a monitor over a staircase landing.

Almost a full 25 years after the original release, Green Day announced a quarter-century anniversary edition of *Nimrod*. It featured over 30 bonus tracks spread over two discs – including demos, live versions and an expected remastering of the original tracks. It's well worth a dive into, as you might notice some of the building blocks found in later Green Day tunes and side projects – for example, 'Black Eyeliner', which gets recycled for 'Church on Sunday' on *Warning* and a song from side-project The Longshot. GD

Despite *Nimrod*'s wide instrumentation, the live tour shows aimed for simplicity – respecting the fans' hunger for earlier material

BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG STRIPPING DOWN BECAME A COMMON SIGHT AFTER GREEN DAY'S WOODSTOCK 1994 PERFORMANCE

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

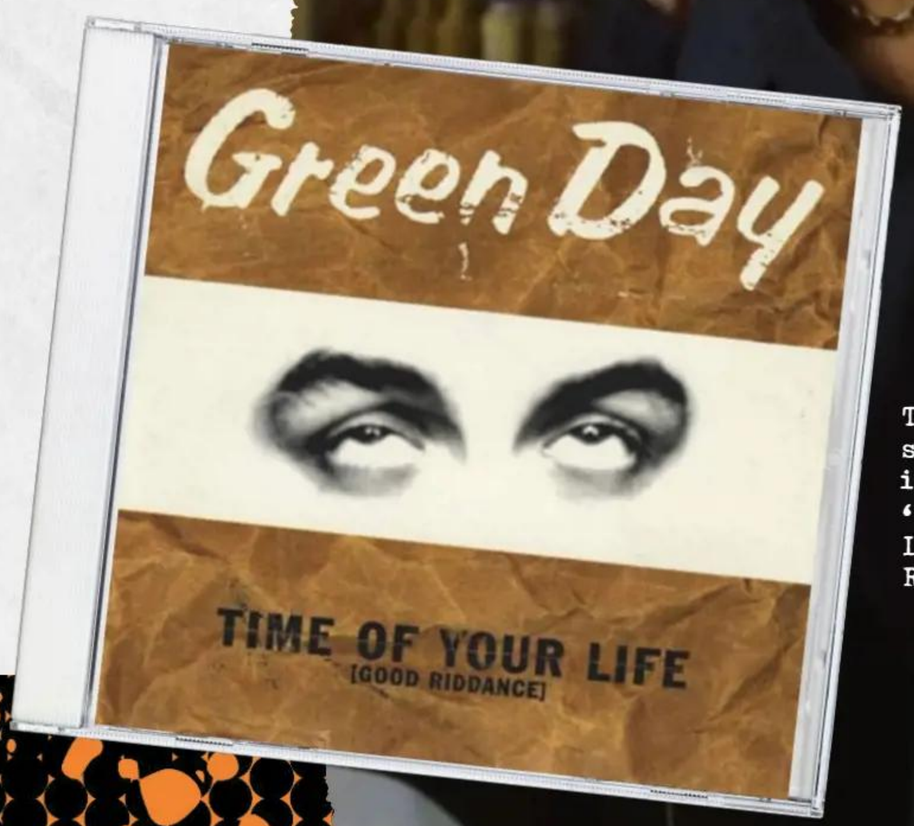
GREEN DAY UNPLUGGED

How Good Riddance (Time of Your Life) marked a sea change for Green Day

Billie

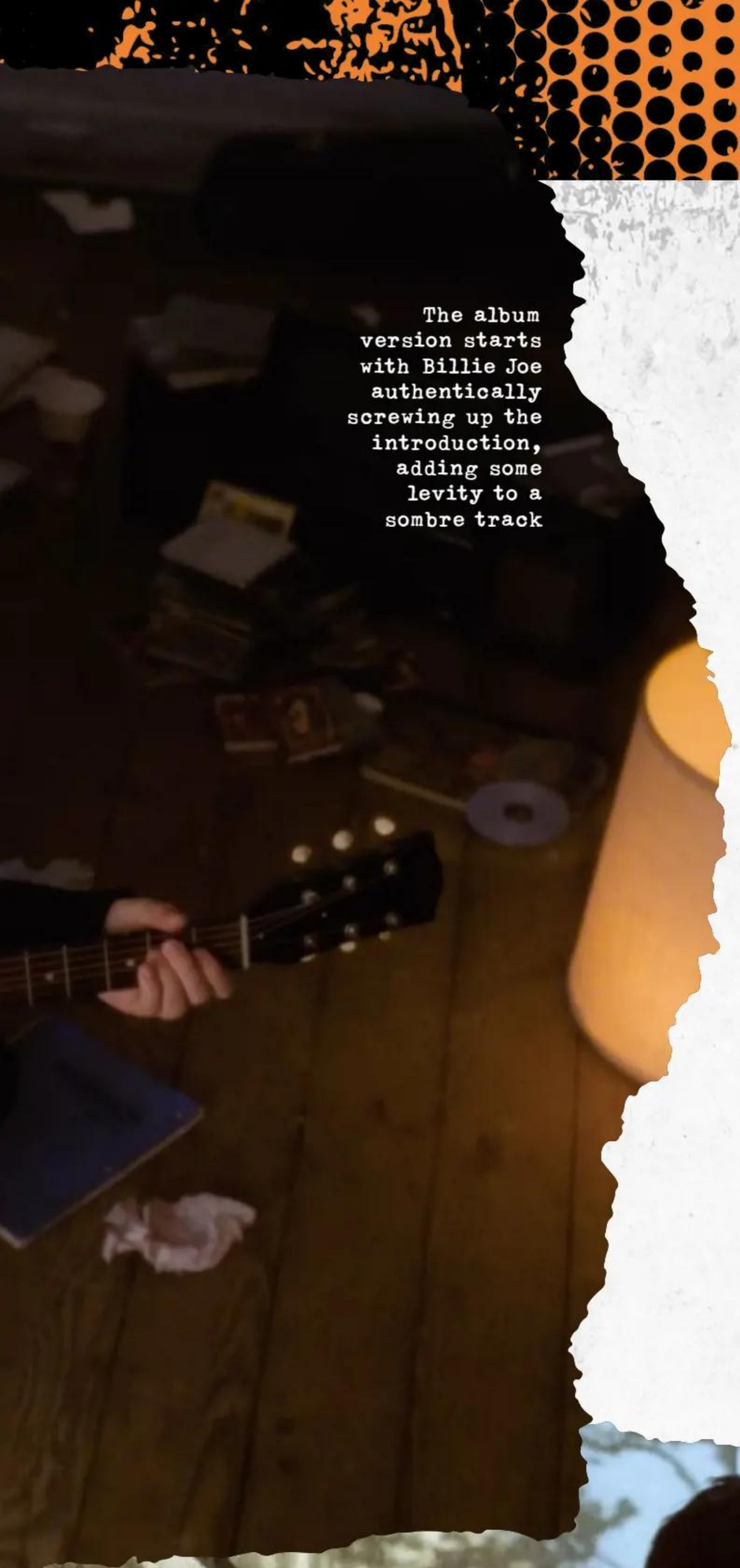
Joe Armstrong once announced in an interview that his band would never "do a Neil Young". His meaning was clear. Unlike all the toothless ex-punks and bloated superstars who littered the music business, Green Day would never surrender their distortion pedals or rework their hits on acoustic for the benefit of a cross-legged audience. Whatever Billie Joe, Mike Dirnt and Tré Cool had become in the aftermath of 1994's *Dookie* – millionaires, celebrities, fathers – they were still punks on vinyl. Smack-in-the-face songs, power chords and bleeding ears remained the band's calling cards, and they had no desire to change.

Until the release of *Nimrod* in 1997, Billie Joe was true to his word. If anything, Green Day seemed to be getting harder and heavier, with hits such as 'Brain Stew' and 'Geek Stink Breath' trading in



The video and single use the inverted title 'Time of Your Life (Good Riddance)'

Words by Henry Yates



The album version starts with Billie Joe authentically screwing up the introduction, adding some levity to a sombre track

bad-tempered guitars and morbid lyrics. So it came as a real surprise when the Green Day faithful reached the 17th track of the new album, only to be confronted with a delicate work of acoustic picking and swooping strings. Where once he had yelled about masturbation, Billie Joe was now singing about forks in the road and lessons learnt in time. Where previously his songs had been thrashed out with youthful abandon on an old Fernandes Stratocaster covered in punk-rock stickers, this one found him strumming a Guild acoustic with skill and precision. Mike's basslines were anonymous; Tré's machine-gun drums notably absent. It was Green Day – but not as we knew it.

The sheer audacity of releasing 'Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life)' more than compensated for its parent-friendly feel. Like John Lydon appearing on *I'm A Celebrity – Get Me Out Of Here!*, its inclusion was 'punk' precisely because it was so 'un-punk'. As Mike would later attest, "Putting it on our record was the most punk thing we could do."

The moshpit might have been bewildered, but those in the band's inner circle must have suspected that a song like 'Good Riddance' was inevitable. While their gigs were still strictly electric affairs, Green Day had long been aware of the benefits of working on acoustic. It was a simple case of practicalities winning out over principles. "The real irony," revealed Mike, "is that for years and years, when people think of us, they think of our heavy guitars and the sounds we've had on our records. But we've written most of our songs on acoustic guitars. When we wake up in the middle of the night to write a song, Billie doesn't run to his amp and plug in his guitar. He picks up an acoustic guitar and starts jamming on it."

Nor was 'Good Riddance' written specifically for *Nimrod*. Billie Joe had penned the song three years earlier and didn't seem bothered whether it even saw the light of day.

"I didn't really think of it as being for an album or anything," the singer admitted to *Guitar World*. Not for the first time, Billie Joe's commercial judgement was flawed. 'Good Riddance' would become the band's most successful single since 'Basket Case', entering both the US and UK charts at number 11 upon its release in January 1998.

'Good Riddance' sounds like a positive ditty, but it's far from it. The fact that radio broadcasters routinely referred to it as 'Time Of Your Life' – as opposed to 'Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life)' – gave listeners the mistaken impression that Billie Joe's lyric was a cosy reflection on past glories. In fact, the song was a bitter rebuke to a former lover.

Billie Joe's lyrics, in conjunction with Mark Kohr's 1997 video (depicting a tattooed youth delivering parcels and a goth dolefully washing windows) lends further weight to the theory that 'Good Riddance' is also an ode to missed opportunities and wasted lives. The concept that he was 'saved' by punk from a life of menial labour is a subject that Billie Joe has touched on in several interviews; it's hard not to see this song as a tribute to the ones he left behind.

While 'Good Riddance' was the final straw for many punk purists, it also announced the beginning of Green Day's metamorphosis from punk brats into a genuinely interesting band. While their other chart-straddling hit, 'Basket Case', had forced them into a restrictive pigeonhole, this latest smash broadened their horizons, suggesting through its commercial success and widespread adoption in events and on TV that the public was ready to accept new directions from the band. After years of clinging to punk for dear life, Green Day were finally ready to cut the apron strings. GD

The video mainly focuses on Billie Joe in a room, with short one-shot cameos from Mike and Tré

Images by Adobe Stock

LOS ANGELES, 1997: GREEN DAY'S RELENTLESS TOURING IN THEIR EARLY DAYS PREPARED THEM WELL FOR SUCCESS

Of all things,
it was a robbery
that would turn
Green Day's
fortunes around
for the better

THE POP-PUNK REVOLUTION YEARS

The 2000s marked the dawn of a new millennium and ushered in the next era for Green Day

Words by Kate Purdy

Green

Day, the band that had taken the world by storm by unleashing *Dookie* in the 1990s, entered the new millennium in search of a new sound. The trio had taken punk music kicking and screaming into the mainstream and into the ears of the masses, who devoured it. However, as good as it was, *Nimrod* didn't make significant waves in 1997 and lacked the widespread impact of *Dookie*. The band needed something else to be relevant in the 2000s. Unfortunately for Billie Joe, Mike and Tré, the situation was going to get worse before it got better. However, without this time of uncertainty and difficulty, Green Day's legendary rebirth would never have happened. Let's take a deeper look at the decade which saw the band go from a rough patch to runaway success.

'GREEN DAY'S PYROMANIAC SET FIRE TO HIS KIT'

TRÉ IGNITES THE WARPED TOUR

The release of Green Day's sixth studio album, *Warning*, in late 2000 saw the band bring a distinct take on the genre they'd found success in. *Warning* focused on acoustic and folk-like sounds, allowing for the likes of singles 'Waiting' and 'Warning', but also the brash ode to the underground 'Minority'. The album was met with a fairly positive set of reviews, with *AllMusic* calling it "tremendously satisfying", however, *Rolling Stone*, questioned whether we needed social commentary from "snot core's biggest-selling band".

Before the album's release, the band made their first and only appearance on the Vans Warped Tour. The booking was unconventional at the time due to the more low-key direction of Green Day's new music style. However, the trio's performance was anything but mellow. The show was drenched in the spirit of punk, with Tré smashing up his drums, and Mike violently strumming his bass and smashing its neck into a nearby amp, before Green Day's resident pyromaniac returned to set fire to his kit. As the flames grew, Billie Joe bid farewell by playing the stripped-down classic 'Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)'.

In the months following that memorable Warped Tour performance, Green Day performed at a free concert

GREEN DAY'S BOLD AND CONFIDENT DECISION TO CREATE AN OVERTLY POLITICAL CONCEPT ALBUM WON THEM CRITICAL ACCLAIM

Green Day attracted hordes of new followers following the release of *American Idiot*

The early 2000s were an uncertain time for Billie Joe, Mike and Tré

known as Take Back San Francisco. This came at a time when the Bay Area saw a rise in rental costs, making the area even more difficult for aspiring artists to live and work in. Many rehearsal studios had to close down, strangling the local music scene. Green Day performed on the steps of Civic Center Plaza to make a statement to keep the area alive.

From late 2001 to the spring of 2002, the situation for Green Day was getting pretty bleak. In an attempt to salvage album sales and stay afloat after the disappointing performance of *Warning*, they released the compilation albums *International Superhits!* and *Shenanigans*. These compilations weren't enough to help the band move into being relevant again, though, so another attempt was made with Green Day co-headlining the Pop Disaster Tour alongside Blink-182 in mid-2002. The tour must have appeared as a win-win for both bands: Blink-182 had higher record sales at the time, whereas Green Day had the more robust fanbase and clout. Tré Cool spoke with *Kerrang!*, saying Green Day saw this experience as an opportunity to "reclaim our throne as the most incredible live punk band". The tour, which spanned 47 dates and two months, was filmed to create the 2003 *Riding in Vans with Boys* tour documentary. At the time, the film was pretty unique and gave the viewer an insider's glance at what touring with the anarchic bands was like.

Although Green Day put on an energy-filled performance, critics like Marc Spitz were not pleased. He recalled in his book, *Nobody Likes You: Inside the Turbulent Life, Times and Music of Green Day*, that the tour was slammed for the co-heading position of the band, likening the co-headliner position of Blink-182 and Green Day to "Frank Sinatra Junior headlining over Frank Sinatra". For some, this tour was considered embarrassing and a sign of the decline of Green Day's fame, and they were fighting to stay afloat. There were even discussions as to whether the band would split up. Billie Joe, Mike and Tré were on a downward spiral, but one more unlucky break was all they needed to turn their fortunes around.

In 2003, following a difficult few years, the band took a step back to write what would've been their seventh album, *Cigarettes and Valentines*. The premise of this album was to go back to a more grassroots punk sound reminiscent of *Kerplunk* and *Insomniac*. However, before the album was finished, the master tapes were stolen from the studio. There were debates as to whether Green Day would re-record the songs from backups, but in the end, the trio decided to ditch the entire project. In time, the band would refer to this incident as a blessing in disguise, as what came next was going to set the world alight.

While this misfortune was surrounding Green Day, speculation was swirling around the anonymous band members of the new-wave newcomers The Network. The band members, particularly Fink, Van Gough and The Snoo, were rumoured to be Green Day in disguise. However, the message from Billie Joe Armstrong at the time was, "F*ck The Network. These guys are totally spreading rumours." The Network released an album in the summer of 2003 called *Money Money 2020* on Billie Joe's record label Adeline Records. The Network even went on to open for Green Day on tour in 2005 – maybe music's worst-kept secret. Not long after the tour, The Network disappeared into obscurity for over a decade, with their identities not officially confirmed until much later.

Back to Green Day, the time has come for them to sink or swim. Their replacement album for *Cigarettes and Valentines* had spun into something ▶

unique, and it was released into the wild in 2004. *American Idiot* debuted at number one on the *Billboard* charts. The 'punk rock opera' was both new ground for Green Day as well as the group doing what they did best: rocking out with a roster of breakneck tracks, while this time pointing fingers at the establishment's "redneck agenda". The album has a unique listening experience, as tracks change point of view from the everyday man to modern icons, even including the leaders the album is driving against. Billie Joe voiced his frustrations and confusion about the news coverage of President George Bush and the Iraq War and poured his disdain into his lyrics. Mike and Tré shared his frustration towards the American government in interviews, encouraging the need "to make a change" and to "make the world a little more sane". Green Day didn't want to preach to the kids, but too much was at stake. *American Idiot* stuck two fingers up to the establishment and became an anthemic protest during the 2004 US presidential election.

In the summer of 2004, Green Day took to the stage for their *American Idiot* world tour. Spanning 167 shows and four continents, fans were treated to the hits from the album, as well as their best-known songs, creating a full musical experience of the band to date. With their musical rebirth, the band's image changed into wearing black and red uniforms which fans would go on to recreate. Not ones to shy away from controversy, Billie Joe, Mike and Tré went full steam ahead into the US tour dates, with the biggest backlash coming from Bush states, including Texas, Tennessee and Georgia. Billie Joe admitted that the band do "everything to piss people off". The arenas were seen to be 60-75% full, with songs from the new album being booed. Billie Joe was often heard shouting "Fuck George W. Bush", with music magazine *Blender*, referring to the concert as an "anti-Bush rally". In comparison, the European leg of the tour sold out in less than an hour, showing the album to be relatable overseas and enjoyed worldwide.

While The Network might have been an attempt to make some music incognito, Foxboro Hot Tubs was a chance for Green Day to let loose and have some fun. In an interview with the *NME*, the Green Day side project spoke of

The band reinvented their image with the release of *American Idiot*

Green Day didn't rest on their mid-2000s momentum and kept on delivering

While *Warning* was undoubtedly a good album, it struggled to perform commercially

'WE TOOK ALL THAT ENERGY TO THE STUDIO'

MIKE ON HOW GREEN DAY SIDE PROJECTS FUELLED CREATIVITY

how they formed from their "love to play music and be spontaneous". Following the global success of *American Idiot*, Foxboro Hot Tubs took fans back to the trio's roots. Whilst Green Day now represented punk politics, Foxboro Hot Tubs embodied 1960s garage rock and channelling the Ramones or The Kinks. The hype spread through messages sent to Green Day's 'Idiot Club' in December 2007, making fans rush to their website to immerse themselves in the new three tracks. The album, *Stop Drop And Roll!!!*, was released in spring 2008, with the single 'Mother Mary' going to number 16 on the *Billboard* Modern Rock chart. The band went on a mini-tour, taking over California stages and revisiting Bay Area venues. "I started liking Foxboro Hot Tubs more than Green Day," Billie Joe said to *Kerrang!*. Mike added that Foxboro Hot Tubs was good fuel for Green Day: "We took that swagger and all that fucking energy back to the studio."

In May 2009, the long-awaited album *21st Century Breakdown* hit our sound systems with the likes of singles 'Know Your Enemy' and '21 Guns'. Following the success of *American Idiot*, the new album was also a concept album with similar themes and became Green Day's most successful chart performance to date, going to number one in 14 countries. Despite the album's success, Walmart refused to sell the album due to the explicit language on the tracks. Green Day declined their request for a censored version, stating, "There's nothing dirty about our record… We just said no. We've never done it before". Walmart dropping the album didn't hurt Green Day's success, however: the *21st Century Breakdown* world tour grossed $74 million in the US, whilst Billie Joe referred to London's Wembley Stadium show as "the biggest fucking show in [the band's] lives".

While this was going on, Green Day set their eyes on a different kind of stage. Years in the making, fans raced to theatres to see *American Idiot – The Musical* in 2009. This reinvention of the popular album followed the lives of three dissatisfied men where two leave suburban life for the big city, both searching for the next high and meaning of life. When speaking about the album, Green Day revealed they took inspiration from musicals such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In an article with *Playbill*, Billie Joe reflected how "[*American Idiot*] felt like scoring a movie". The musical opened in Berkeley Repertory Theatre, California, in September 2009, with a cast including the likes of John Gallagher Jr and Rebecca Naomi Jones. Reviews of the musical at this point were fairly positive referring to it as having "the grungy spirit of punk while also plucking at heartstrings" but others referred to characters which lacked "emotional depth" and plotlines that were too simple. However, with *American Idiot* becoming the top-grossing show in the theatre's history, this was a sign of great things to come for the musical.

To round off the biggest decade for Green Day, *Consequence of Sound* crowned them the "Band of the Decade". From struggling to have a hit in the early 2000s, to becoming a household name with non-rock fans, Green Day had achieved the rebirth of the century whilst maintaining their identity. "Green Day continues to tear the house walls down, pillar by pillar and generation after generation," the article proclaimed.

Billie Joe, Mike and Tré had reached heights they had never seen before. The trio was on top of the world, and there were no signs they were slowing down. GD

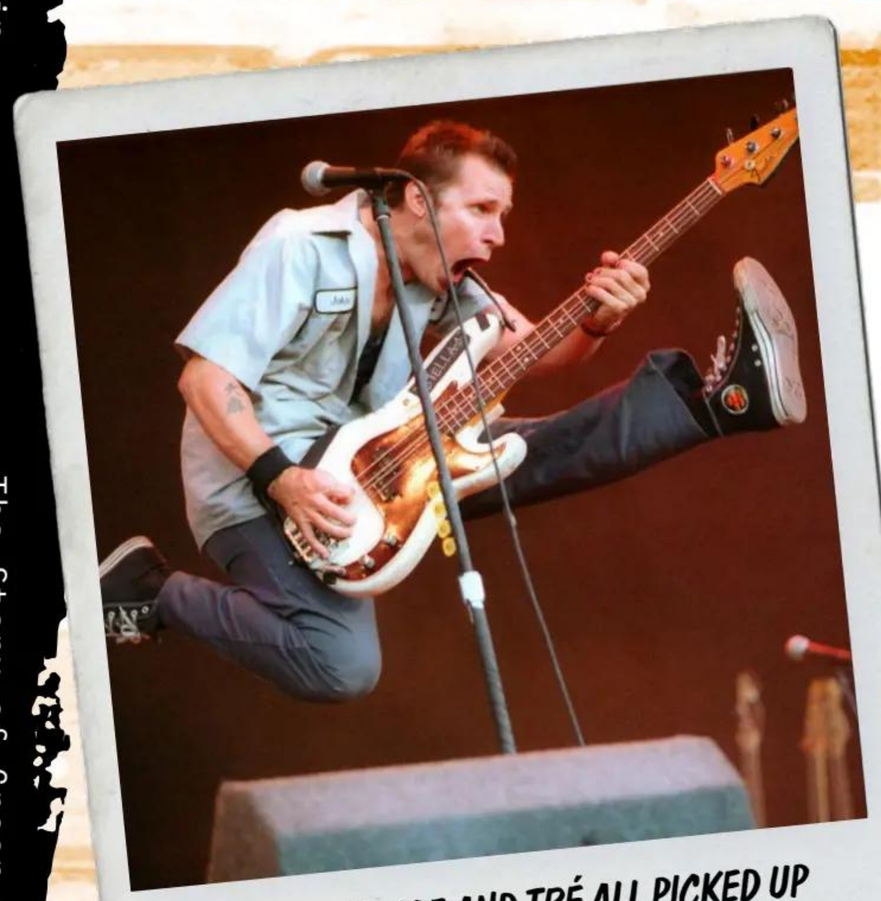
Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

IT UPSET THE OLD SCHOOL FANBASE BUT PUT GREEN DAY SQUARELY IN THE MAINSTREAM

Warning

2000, Reprise

Words by Shane Baldwin



MIKE, BILLIE JOE AND TRÉ ALL PICKED UP DIFFERENT INSTRUMENTS FOR WARNING SUCH AS HARMONICA, ACCORDION AND MANDOLIN

If the acoustic touches on *Nimrod* weren't enough of a clue to the next direction Green Day were to take, the band's show at Neil Young's Bridge School Benefit concert in 1999 should have been portentous enough for even the dullest observer.

Maybe an acoustic performance – apparently the first ever by Green Day – was perhaps in keeping with the event, but they embraced the style with relish. After an absence from the public gaze of nearly two years, the band began work on *Warning*, having parted ways with the services of producer Rob Cavallo (a surprise in itself, as they had worked with him constantly since *Dookie*, although he retained executive producer status), and recruited Scott Litt who had worked with hitmakers such as REM and Nirvana.

As it happens, the early sessions proved unsatisfactory. The band and Scott disagreed over the musical direction of the record, resulting in Scott leaving the project. Billie Joe Armstrong would later say that there were no hard feelings and "it just wasn't the right chemistry". Instead, the band elected to produce the album solo, with Jack Joseph Puig as mixer and Rob Cavallo returning as executive producer.

Even if *Warning* was destined to have an acoustic element, the extent of it was still a shock to many fans. Quoting influences such as Bob Dylan and Tom Waits, Billy Joe told *NY Rock* in October 2000: "I don't want to paint myself into a corner; punk rock will always be a part of my life. But I don't want to limit myself musically. On *Warning*, we managed to test how far we can go. I love punk, and punk songs will always be part of Green Day. But it would be really limiting if we'd neglect something we really want to do, like explore other styles of music."

The album's lyrics – though still largely bleak in tone – lacked the cynical edge of earlier albums, and Billie Joe admitted that his more grounded lifestyle as a family man had made a difference. "I don't want to live in an ivory tower, being the songwriter who just turns inward," he remembered. "I always want to be part of the whole thing. That's why I live a pretty normal life at home, go shopping… all that. It's part of my life, and I don't want to have that part of my life taken from me."

The album was preceded by the single 'Minority', a folky, almost sea-shanty-like song, which, for all its jauntiness, can hardly have done much to placate the die-hard punk purists from the band's roots, even with the affirmatory lyric: "I pledge allegiance to the underworld". Still, it hit the spot with the public at large, and after only four weeks, 'Minority' shot to the top of the *Billboard* Modern Rock chart, giving Green Day their quickest number-one slot to date. An omen?

The next song was the folky title track, 'Warning' – a song where Billie Joe originally wanted to construct the lyrics from signs and labels. Strangely, the trio opted not to perform the track live for nigh-on 20 years after 2001, until a warm-up gig ahead of their 2022 Lollapalooza appearance. The third single, 'Waiting', returned to more typical arrangements, though it hovered in the 20s to 30s end of airplay charts.

Warning was released on 3 October in a promotional hailstorm that included an MTV 'First Listen' special, *The Late Show With David Letterman*, *The Howard Stern Show,* plus in-store appearances, radio slots and a jaunt around Europe.

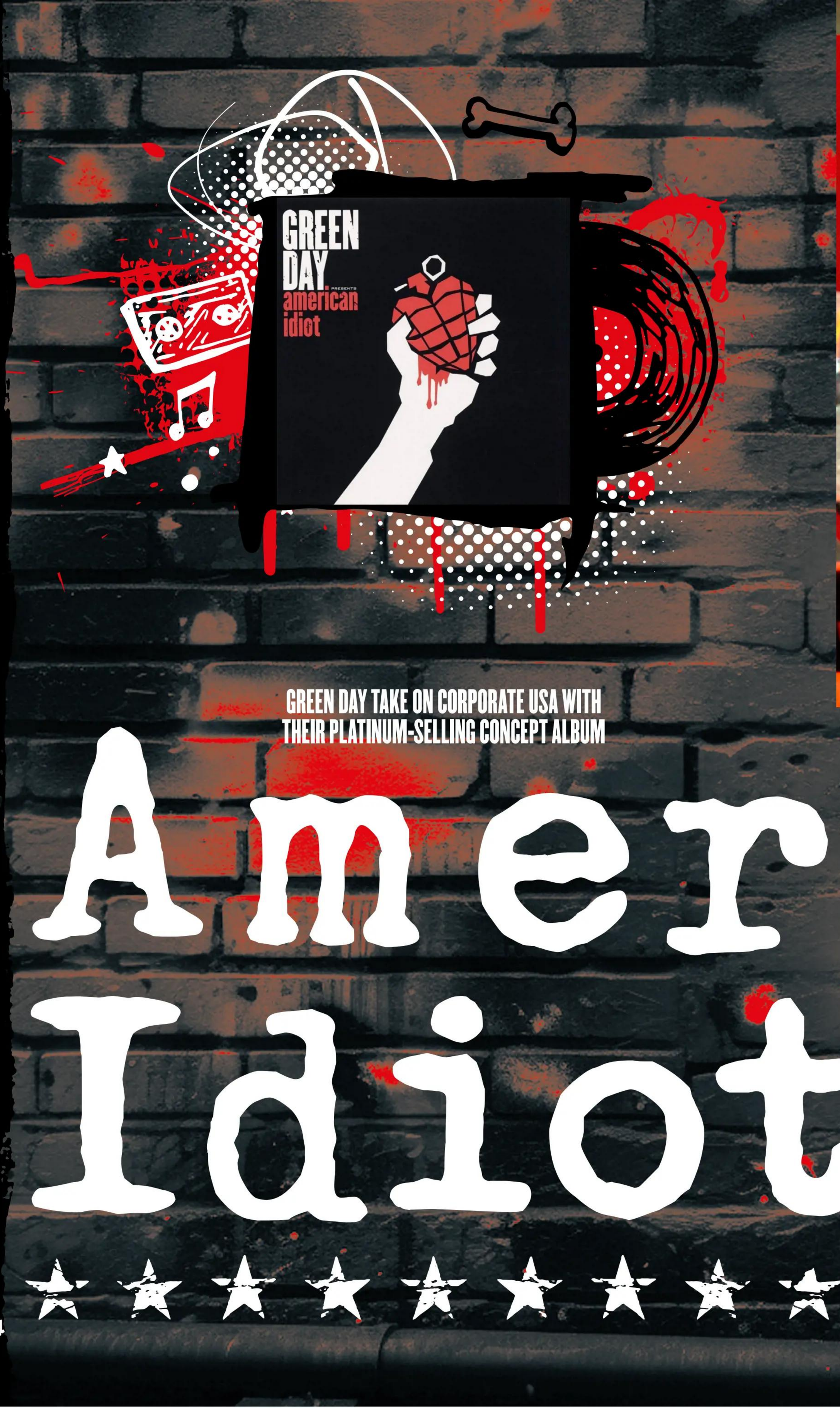
The groundwork for the album included playing the Warped Tour for the first time, their headline spot pulling more attendees than ever before to the lumbering punk rock travelling circus. Their pulling power was such that the Toronto date attracted 7,000 more punters than any other year. It paid off – to an extent – *Warning* reached number four in the charts in both the US and the UK, but inevitably, it attracted derision from the old crowd. And equally unsurprisingly, *Warning*'s sales were still dwarfed by the albatross that *Dookie* was fast becoming.

Inevitably, *Warning*'s legacy was dwarfed by the mania that surrounded *American Idiot* four years later. However, now almost 25 years of dust have settled since its release, the album stands out as one of the braver attempts at genre-hopping from the band, and the likes of 'Minority' enjoy regular rotation on Green Day's live setlists. GD

PUNK ROCK WILL ALWAYS BE A PART OF MY LIFE BUT I DON'T WANT TO LIMIT MYSELF MUSICALLY

Despite the low-key elements of *Warning*, Green Day were still seen as a punk outfit

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images



GREEN DAY TAKE ON CORPORATE USA WITH THEIR PLATINUM-SELLING CONCEPT ALBUM

American Idiot

Words by Ian Winwood

The band adopted a new wardrobe for touring and promos, with Tré suiting up behind his kit

2004, Reprise

i.c.a.n

To fully appreciate the achievement that is *American Idiot*, released in September 2004, it's worth thinking about what might have happened to the band had events taken a different turn.

The story the three of them affirm is that before the recording of *American Idiot*, they had another album recorded and more or less locked and loaded. That album was *Cigarettes and Valentines*. Billie Joe Armstrong, in conversation in 2005, described the material on that album to be, "good stuff, solid stuff", but when asked how many copies he thought *Cigarettes and Valentines* might have sold if released on the open market, he replied, "Certainly not as many as *American Idiot*."

The thing is, you see, *Cigarettes and Valentines* never made it onto the new-release racks. This was, according to the band, because someone stole the master recordings. Quite how it was possible for the latest sounds from major recording artists to be half-inched from a top-line recording studio, with no backup recordings surviving, is a question you might care to ponder yourself. But whatever: this is the story. "It really was," revealed Billie Joe, "a blessing in disguise."

This it may have been, but first, let's have a word about that 'major recording artists' tag, shall we? Thing is, by the time our burgled trio had steadied themselves to record what would eventually become the successor to 2000's *Warning*, the band's star could hardly be said to have been in the ascendant. *Warning* had garnered only a lukewarm reception from the band's dwindling fan base. In the US and parts of mainland Europe, the group had downgraded from arenas to theatres. Blink-182 were the new 'new punk' darlings. With just a few noisy exceptions, critics wrote about Green Day – if they wrote about them at all – in words that were either begrudging, patronising or else lethargic and familiar.

The snotty, cocky, wide-eyed bunch of enfants terribles who paraded themselves to the delight of the mainstream on *Dookie*, way back in 1994, were suddenly looking and (worse) acting and (worse still) sounding their age. It didn't suit them, or so the consensus had it. Green Day, slowly but surely, were fading out of focus, drifting out of range.

EVERYONE WERE ASKING 'HAVE THEY LOST THEIR FUCKING MINDS?'

OF THEM SELVES

Now think about it: bands which nearly everyone in the critical communities have decided are about to clock out do not return with albums that sell 23 million copies. The fact that Green Day managed this is nothing less than astonishing. And if you think that word is an exaggeration, then consider this: at the start of 2004, Green Day were probably closer to being dropped by their label than to becoming, in just a year's time, the biggest rock band on Earth.

However, this repositioning began early on, many months before a note of *American Idiot* had been heard by outside ears. It was phrases leaking out of the recording studio in Hollywood, California, that began to grab people by the ears. Phrases like 'political songs', 'nine-minute songs', 'concept album' and 'punk rock opera'. For anyone who considered Green Day – whether positively or negatively – to be a reliable, dependable splash of colour, such notions simply did not compute. Even for those more predisposed to the band's then-underrated charms – those who ▶

Billie Joe, Tré and Mike receiving the coveted Best Rock Album Grammy

Once Green Day knew they had a winner, there was a hefty marketing push for *American Idiot*

A live album, *Bullet in a Bible* followed shortly after in 2005

recognised them as a forward-thinking, independently minded, musically adroit outfit – such prospects were at the very least a little puzzling.

At that point, Green Day had precisely two songs under their belt that might in any way be described as political (and then only just – 2000's 'Minority' and 2002's 'Maria'), so the notion of a whole bevy of tunes concerned with whatever Billie Joe had read about in *The San Francisco Examiner* or *The Oakland Tribune* that morning seemed (and let's be generous here) hardly the stuff of successful comebacks.

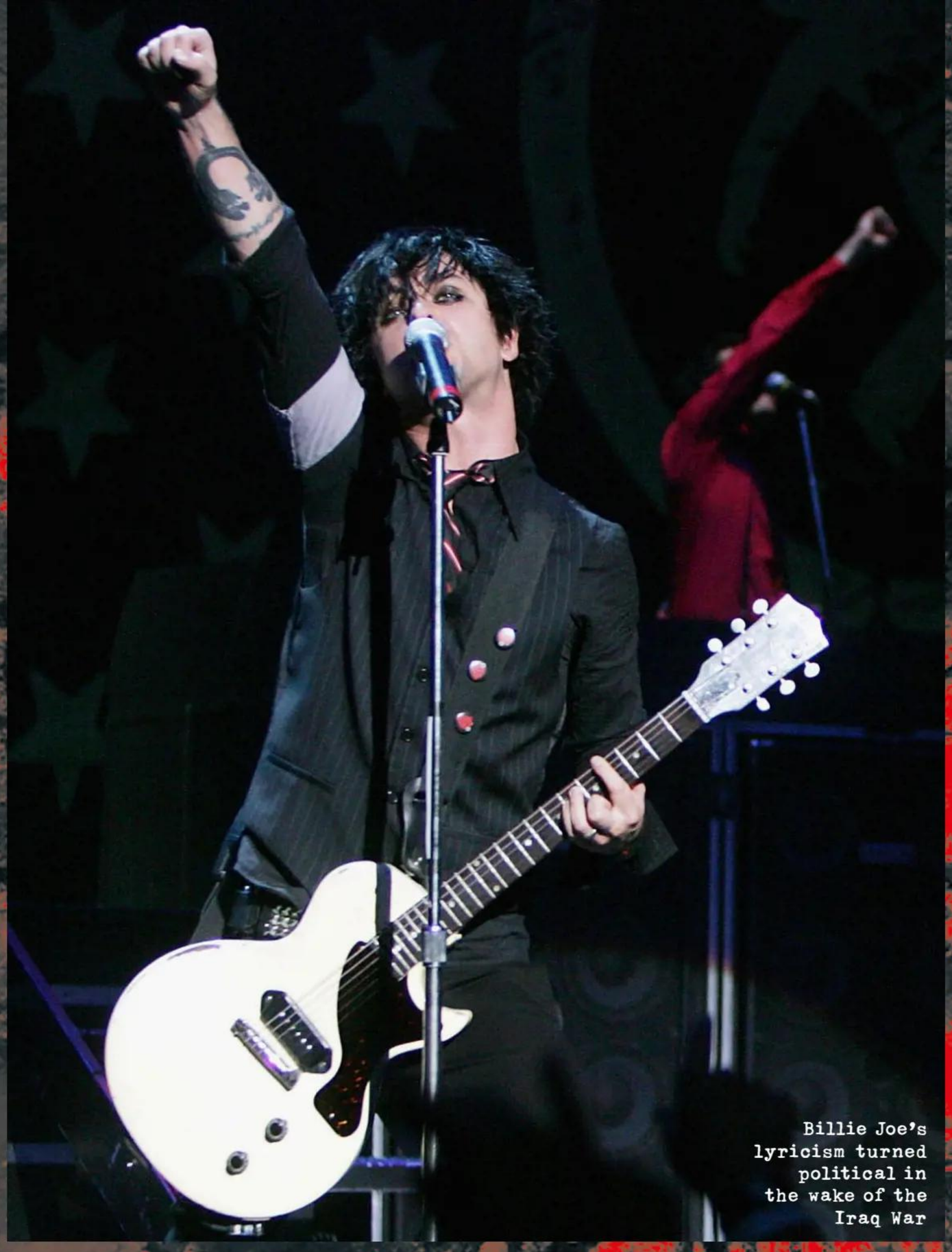
Then there was the matter of the nine-minute songs. Green Day numbers typically clocked in at three minutes, sometimes less; while the group were never in a hurry to finish their tunes (witness the glorious slowdown/slide-away ending of 'Longview', for example), no one had ever returned a copy of *Insomniac* complaining that it didn't sound enough like *Wish You Were Here*. Then there was the whole 'concept album' thing, which didn't make a lot of sense either (previous Green Day albums were populated by frustrated loners, angry idealists and idle miscreants – the only story they might have fitted into would have been a musical rendition of *The Catcher in the Rye*). As for the matter of a punk-rock opera… well, there was only one question to be asked…"

"People heard about what we were planning for this album," recalled Billie Joe in February 2005. "And every one of them must have been asking themselves, 'Have they lost their fucking minds?'"

It's tempting to say that with *American Idiot*, Green Day didn't so much lose their minds as find their voice. But this would be untrue. They've always had a voice, from their knowing cover of Operation Ivy's 'Knowledge' to the composed genius of 'Church on Sunday' (on *Warning*) – it's just that here their natural sense of suspicion and disenfranchisement had found an outlet. Suddenly, Billie Joe's disaffection could explode outward as opposed to simply seeping inward. People always had the time to listen to him whine; now they were about to hear what he sounded like when he protested something other than his inability to gain an erection.

Of all the triumphs *American Idiot* represents, it's the lyrical aspect that's perhaps the most remarkable. The advance whispers that this was going

With *American Idiot*, Green Day pointed their middle fingers squarely at George W Bush



Billie Joe's lyricism turned political in the wake of the Iraq War

to be a concept album were somewhere wide of the mark, but not so wide as not to contain a certain truth. This is a record that occupies a space familiar to both its protagonists and its listeners: towns with no past, jobs with no future, relationships with little hope, friends with no brains. Some characters emerge and then re-emerge several songs down the line. There is St. Jimmy, for instance, a firebrand ne'er-do-well, "the patron saint of the denial", a character of such defiant fragility that by 'Homecoming', the album's penultimate track, he's gone, dead from blowing "his brains out into the bay". Elsewhere in this mix of outcasts, we find "the son of rage and love", the Jesus of Suburbia; we find the Extraordinary Girl, we find Whatsername; we find a rock-and-roll star who can "play the shit out of the drums" and who can "play the guitar".

The underlying tone here is of mistrust and unease, an itch that can't be scratched or a danger you can't quite see amid the gloom and fog of doobie smoke. An angered narrator is forced to look at his surroundings and wonder, "Where have all the bastards gone?" To ask, "Where have all the riots gone?" This is during 'Letterbomb'. Some three-and-a-bit minutes later, the narrator's girlfriend has quit him too, saying, "I can't take this town – I'm leaving you tonight".

But for what? At its furthest horizons lies *American Idiot*'s political frontiers, the backdrop against which the characters rebel. Out there is "a new kind of tension, all across the alienation". Out there is a land overseen by people who want to kill "the ****" who don't agree with their New (yet really very old) World Order. A world where politics is paranoia and bloodshed is good for business.

American Idiot is an album where characters are damned if they do and dead if they don't. Set against the yelping hysteria of national idiocy, it's the cry of a songwriter who may not be able to beat these idiots, but who certainly won't be joining them. It weaves the personal with the political in a way that makes the whole thing poignant. It also arrives with enough conviction to make the case that Billie Joe is one of the most underrated lyricists of the day.

All of this would, of course, have meant absolutely nothing were it not for the music that surrounded *American Idiot*. Bittersweet defiance on such a brilliant and grand scale would have been wasted and, well, ridiculous, had Green Day not widened their musical horizons to a similar degree. It's at this point precisely that the idea of nine-minute songs suddenly begins to sound less and less ridiculous.

Musically, there are two remarkable things about *American Idiot*. The first is how natural the whole record sounds. Whether it be the pinball dynamics of the five-part 'Jesus Of Suburbia' or the five-part 'Homecoming' (18 minutes between them), the lush restraint of 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams' or the wall-of-sound anthem that is 'We Are the Waiting', this is an album of many shades and tints. Part of it is punk rock, the idiot breeze of 'St. Jimmy' or the three-chord groove of 'She's a Rebel'. Part of it is mainstream balladry, with 'Boulevard…' and 'Wake Me Up When September Ends' featuring as staples on mainstream radio (and why not?). Part of it is nothing less than Broadway with a chorus of guitars; 'Dearly Beloved' could have come from *Little Shop of Horrors*, 'Homecoming' could be an updated spin from *West Side Story*.

And herein lies the second, even more remarkable thing: the sheer effort that must have gone into its creation. Lyrically, sure, but musically too. Here Green Day have taken their natural ability to write a song – drummer Tré Cool described Billie Joe's knack for this as being "the closest thing to magic you'll ever see" – and married it with a disciplined work ethic. This is an album that hasn't been so much written as built, a selection of tunes and ideas that have been moulded and fashioned into a monster.

"It'll probably be a commercial disaster," Billy Joe predicted, three months prior to the album's release. Only it wasn't; it isn't. Two decades on from the arrival – the unveiling – of *American Idiot*, Green Day have achieved the virtually impossible. They arrested a commercial decline and risen, for the second time, to the level of a phenomenon. They had created an album, their seventh, that is by some considerable margin the finest work they've put their name to. And in doing this they set a new standard in terms of what might be achieved in the pursuit of rock-and-roll excellence. GD

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

ANGER AND DISAFFECTION WITH AN AMERICA RAVAGED BY GEORGE W. BUSH'S PRESIDENCY INFORMS GREEN DAY'S EIGHTH STUDIO ALBUM, A STUNNINGLY AMBITIOUS WORK

21st Century Breakdown

Words by Neil Crossley

2009, Reprise

"We'll start with silence, and that's how we'll be able to find the inspiration to find another record," said Billie Joe Armstrong in a 2006 interview with *Spotlighting News* following the colossal success of *American Idiot*.

It was a tough act to follow, but *21st Century Breakdown* picked up where its predecessor left off. Essentially, it's a concept album that tries to make sense of what it means to be living in an America tainted by George W. Bush's presidency.

As the band told Jack Riley of *The Independent* in May 2009, the album is a rumination of "the era in which we live as we question and try to make sense of the selfish manipulation going on around us".

At its core, *21st Century Breakdown* is a protest album: strident, angry and defiant. In October 2007, Billie Joe told *Rolling Stone* that he had written "something like 45 songs", which was finessed down to 18.

The first thing to note is that *21st Century Breakdown* sounds phenomenal, and much of this is due to the band's new choice of producer, Butch Vig, best known for producing Nirvana's 1991 album *Nevermind*.

After touring to promote *American Idiot*, the band took some time out. Billie

21st Century Breakdown

21st Century Breakdown was one of the few Green Day albums not produced by Rob Cavallo

Joe helped victims of Hurricane Katrina, taking his family to New Orleans to help build houses and later travelling to France and Mexico, while Tré Cool headed for Cuba and Mike Dirnt visited Europe.

They reconvened as Foxboro Hot Hubs, their wry garage rock side project formed in 2007. The sonic looseness of this outfit was cathartic for Green Day, and they embarked on the *Stop, Drop and Roll!!!* tour. By the time they came to start work on *21st Century Breakdown*, they were in good shape.

Many of the songs were written by Billie Joe Armstrong on piano rather than guitar. He worked in his home studio, recording demos but keeping his lyrics a closely guarded secret from the band and Butch Vig. It wasn't until late 2008 that he sat down with the band and their producer and read the album's entire lyrics in order.

21st Century Breakdown is divided into three parts: 'Heroes and Cons'; 'Charlatans and Saints'; and 'Horseshoes and Handgrenades'. The first part opens with 'Song Of The Century', which intros with the crackling sound of an analogue radio. This is followed by a lo-fi, distant vocal refrain from Billie Joe, which sounds like a plaintive Dust Bowl field recording from the 1930s. "Sing us a song of the century / That's louder than bombs / And eternity / The era of static and contraband". It's a haunting, evocative intro and sets the scene for the album that is to follow.

A circular piano motif opens the anthemic title track, which is reminiscent of The Who. The guitars and bass are epic and wide, while Tré Cool's drums have a real sonic wallop. At 2:14, it shifts tempo and segues into a galloping power chord-driven track before ending on a slow lighters-in-the-air conclusion.

'Know Your Enemy' is next up, one of the album's highlights, with a Stax-style drum intro unfolding into another 4/4 crunching slab of power pop. Highlights include Billie Joe's heavily compressed palm-muted riffing and wonderfully twisted guitar lines over the top.

A mellifluous piano opens 'Viva La Gloria!', which is reminiscent of Bruce Springsteen's 'Jungleland'. At 1:08, the song lurches into another 4/4 foot-to-the-floor rocker. Once again, Butch Vig's production yields sonic clout, with Mike's bass and Tré's toms leaping from the mix.

Beatles' influences are at the fore on 'Last Night On Earth', another high point of the album, with its graceful ascending chord structures and spacious, wide-open refrain. Billie Joe's voice has a mellow, textural John Lennon-esque quality on the hook-laden top-line melody.

There's a sonic abandon to 'East Jesus Nowhere', which focuses on religious hypocrisy. Mike's bass, in particular, has a wonderful fluidity to it. 'Horseshoes and Handgrenades', meanwhile, which opens part three, is a lean, aggressive track which has all the grit and attitude of a UK punk band circa 1976.

The album is not without its flaws. Lyrically, it sounds addled at times, and the overall concept of the album feels ill-formed. But melded to Butch Vig's production, the record has real intent, and Billie Joe's disaffection feels heartfelt.

21st Century Breakdown was released on 15 May 2009 and shot to number one in the US, UK and many other countries. Some critics criticised the concept's lack of clarity. "Too many buzz words obscure incisive meaning," noted Chris Jones of the BBC, while Alexis Petridis in *The Guardian* observed that "the storyline becomes impossible to follow".

Others called it a triumph, *Rolling Stone* called the album, "A compound bomb of classic-rock ecstasy, no-mercy punk assault and pop-song wiles; it's like The Clash's *London Calling*, The Who's *Quadrophenia* and Husker Du's *Arcade* all compressed into 18 songs." GD

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

GREEN DAY POSING WITH THE 1968 MERCURY MONTEREY USED IN THE VIDEOS FOR 'HOLIDAY' AND 'BOULEVARD'

GOOD TIMES

From addiction and cancelled tours to landmark moments – how the 2010s unfolded for Green Day

Words by Neil Crossley

If there's one thing that A-list rock bands love, it's donning disguises to play incognito performances that are light years away from their platinum-selling day jobs. Witness the glee on the faces of U2 as they performed a busking set to largely disinterested passersby at New York's 42nd St Grand Central station in 2015, before peeling off fake beards to whoops of delight and hurtling into a soaring rendition of 'Desire'. Then there was REM, performing an acoustic set as Bingo Hand Job to awestruck fans at London's Borderline club in 1991.

BAD TIMES

Green Day, too, saw the cathartic potential of cutting loose creatively when, in 2007, they began performing secret shows as a clandestine band called the Foxboro Hot Tubs. In 2008, they opened as the second support band to themselves, as a Halloween surprise at Manchester's MEN Arena. They kept the disguise up for some time before finally coming clean in an announcement to *MTV News*: "We are four guys who love to play music and be spontaneous, [and] after a few late-night jams and a few too many bottles of wine, we were inspired to record some rockin' eight-track recordings."

The Foxboro Hot Tubs and their spontaneous ethos would inspire Green Day's next studio project: a trilogy of albums entitled *¡Uno!*, *¡Dos!* and *¡Tré!*.

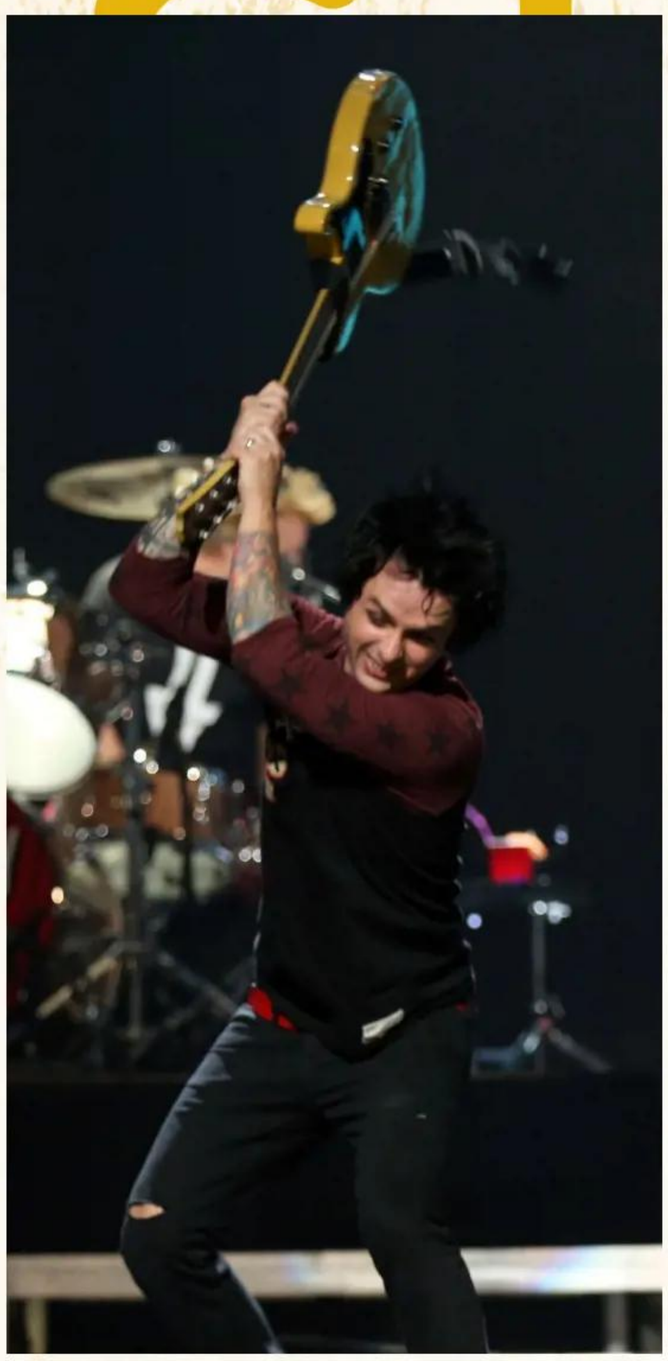
Recording began in February 2012 and followed their epic *21st Century Breakdown* tour, which kicked off at the Impact Arena in Bangkok on 12 January 2010 and wound up its final leg in San José, Costa Rica on 29 October 2010.

The new albums featured the addition of long-time touring guitarist Jason White. This was the first time that Jason had appeared on a Green Day studio album, and in the summer of 2012, the band played several festivals and promotional shows, including the Rock en Seine Festival in France, the Rock am See festival in Germany and the Reading Festival in the UK.

That same month, Billie Joe Armstong unveiled details of the proposed album trilogy to *MTV News*. "We are at the most prolific and creative time in our lives… This is the best music we've ever written, and the songs just keep coming. Instead of making one album, we are making a three-album trilogy. Every song has the power and energy that represents Green Day on all emotional levels. We just can't help ourselves […] We are going epic as fuck!"

But two days before the release of *¡Uno!*, Billie Joe announced he would be seeking help for his addiction to alcohol and prescription medication. The singer later disclosed he was attempting to self-medicate to deal with the symptoms of anxiety and insomnia. The group scrapped their remaining 2012 tour dates and postponed their 21-date US tour.

The release dates for the three albums were brought forward to 21 September, 9 November, and 7 December 2012. "We feel bad we have to delay our tour, so to make up for it, we want to give our fans the music earlier than we had planned,"



drummer Tré Cool explained. "If we couldn't be there to play it for you live, the least we could do was give you the next best thing."

In PR and promotional terms, it was a complete disaster. This meant that the band was essentially releasing three albums – 37 new songs – within the space of 78 days. "It was an overwhelming amount of new music," reported *Billboard* in December 2012. "The release plan certainly affected the singles roll-out of the three albums, as *¡Dos!* and *¡Tré!* afforded little time to grow on alternative and rock radio."

Despite such challenges, the first album of the trilogy, *¡Uno!*, performed well, entering the top five in 22 countries, including the US and the UK where it reached number two.

In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Billie Joe stressed the theme of *¡Uno!* would be far removed from that of *21st Century Breakdown* and *American Idiot*. For starters, it would not be a rock opera, he said, but "punchier, more power pop – somewhere between

Billie Joe's struggles came to the fore at iHeartRadio Music Festival in 2012

AC/DC and the early Beatles". A few of the songs would sound more like dance music and garage rock, he added.

And that was pretty much how critics perceived its back-to-basics sound. "Twelve blasts of hook-savvy mosh-pit pop," is how David Fricke put it in *Rolling Stone*, while *Kerrang!* magazine called it "a sharp and often exhilarating change of gear from the Green Day of the past eight years".

But others had misgivings. Jason Heller of *The AV Club* noted that "filler abounds, and it doesn't land with quite as much delirious abandon as it once did, but Billie Joe's power-pop impulse can still pack a face-splitting punch". *AllMusic* editor Stephen Thomas Erlewine meanwhile observed that the band's "big, crisp, and clean" sound "undercuts some of the punkiness of Green Day's intentions", before adding that the band's massive hooks "gleefully bludgeon doubters into blissful submission".

The album got a significant boost when the lead single 'Oh Love' reached number one on the *Billboard* 200 charts. Released on 16 July 2012, the track's strident power pop was reminiscent of earlier albums such as *Dookie* and *Nimrod*.

The trio showing off the success for *21st Century Breakdown* at the Grammys

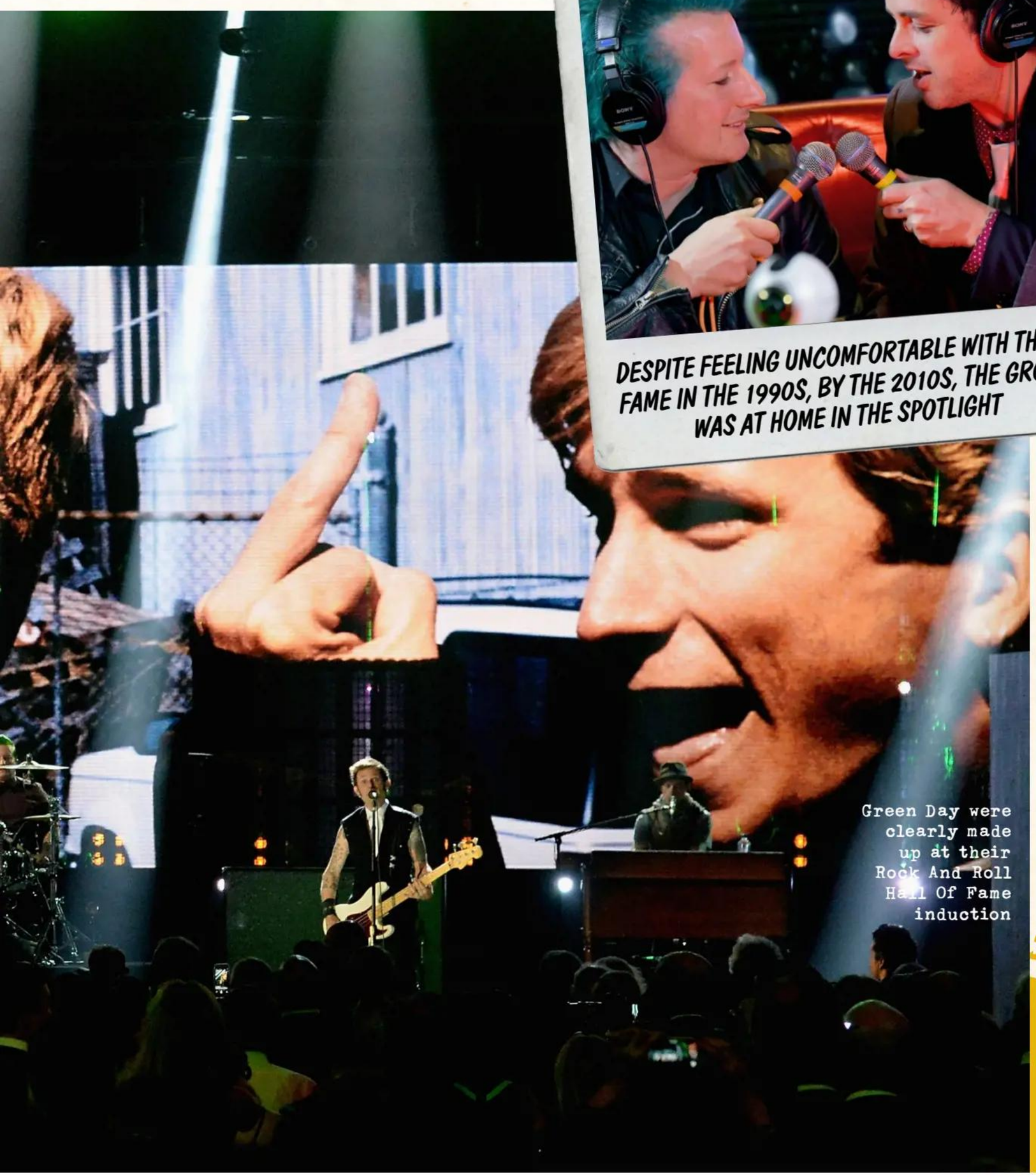
DESPITE FEELING UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THEIR FAME IN THE 1990S, BY THE 2010S, THE GROUP WAS AT HOME IN THE SPOTLIGHT

"We were just thinking about making a killer power-pop record – dirtier, back to basics," bassist Mike Dirnt told *Rolling Stone* in July 2012.

The song debuted at number one on the *Billboard* Hot Rock and Alternative Songs charts and hit number one in Canada, although it reached only number 97 on the *Billboard* Hot 100.

¡Dos! And *¡Tré!* were released on 9 November and 7 December 2012 respectively. In a review of *¡Dos!* In November 2012, Randall Roberts of the *Los Angeles Times* commended Green Day for "allowing in a much wider range of sounds and styles" and concluded that the album was "way more impressive than the rudimentary math of *¡Uno!*… the good news is that it's a far better record than *¡Uno!* In fact, it's an excellent Green Day album – one of its best – a catchy, revealing work that surprises with its willingness to explore ideas that the band members may not have invented, but which, fed through Green Day's filter, become theirs."

But other critics in the music press were not convinced. Jason Heller of *The AV Club* detected a lack of joy in the band's "garage-rock angle", noting that Green Day "feel like they're writing



Green Day were clearly made up at their Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction

a paper on the genre rather than celebrating it in song".

¡Tré!, the final release of the trilogy and their 11th studio album, echoed the power pop and garage rock style of *¡Uno!*. The album reached number 13 on the *Billboard* 200 charts and number three on the *Billboard* Rock Albums chart. The album wasn't a global hit but performed respectably, reaching number 31 in the UK albums chart, number 17 in Germany and number ten in the Japanese albums chart.

Kerrang! called it "the best of the bunch", but Michael Hann in *The Guardian* noted that "it's got some pretty good songs – but they never get better than pretty good".

On 22 January 2013, the band announced that a documentary about the making of *¡Uno!*, *¡Dos!*, *¡Tré!*, entitled *Cuatro!*, would be premiered four days later in Aspen, Colorado, as part of the X Games FILM showcase, with a DVD slated for release on 9 April 2013. Another documentary was announced called *Broadway Idiot*, which focused on the creation of the *American Idiot* musical and Billie Joe's role as the character of St. Jimmy.

In March of that year, with Billie Joe Armstrong out of rehab and returned to good health, the band embarked on their 99 Revolutions tour to promote the trilogy of albums. In June, the band broke London's Emirates Stadium attendance record with 60,000 tickets sold. On the European leg, the band played the *Dookie* album in its entirety and performed a headline slot at the 2013 Reading Festival.

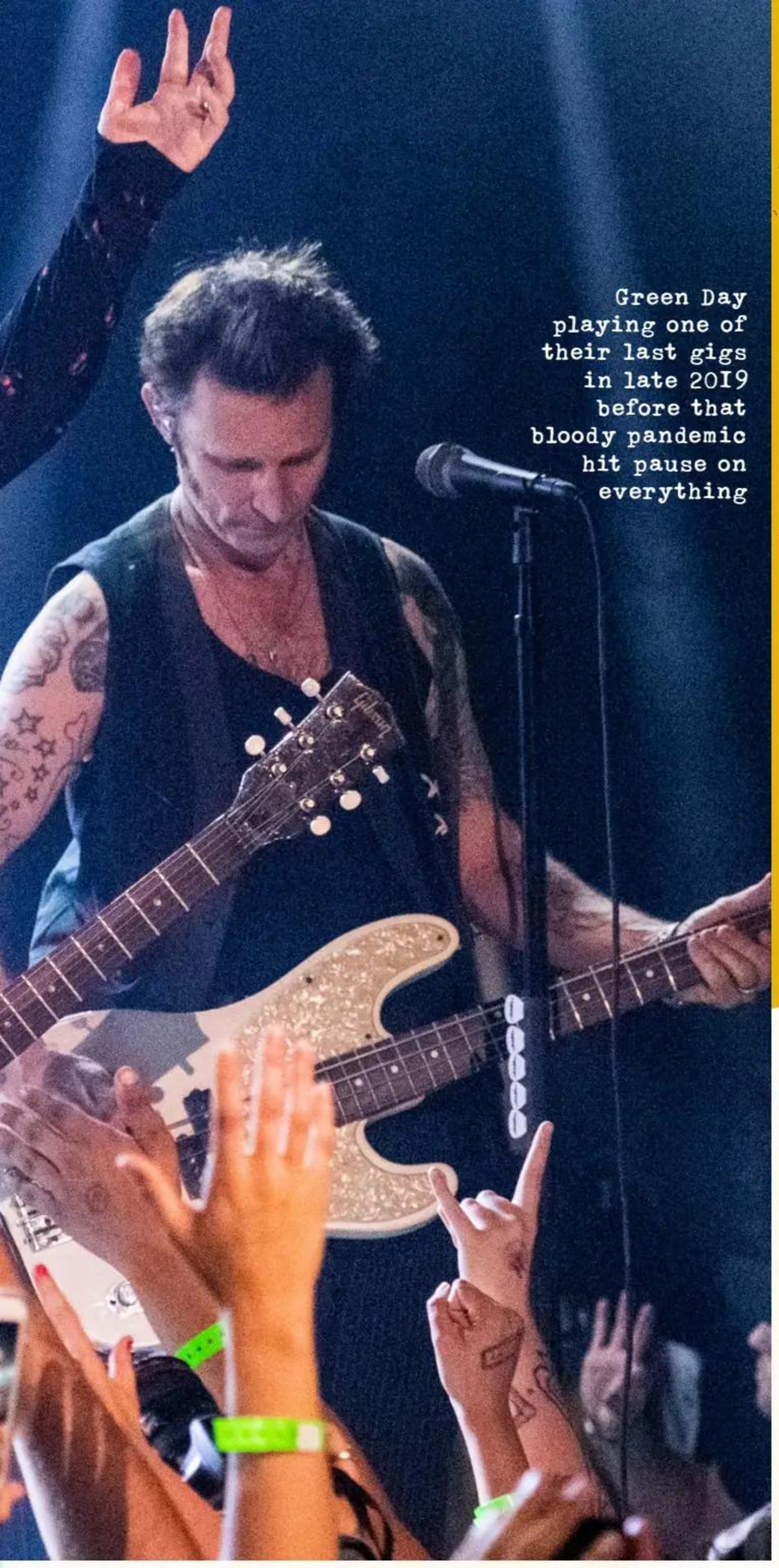
In 2015, Green Day were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, an honour that was deemed by many to be long overdue. The band took to the stage to deliver a phenomenal rendition of 'Basket Case', which had the vast audience on their feet within seconds. "Rock and Roll Hall of Fame baby," screamed a grinning Billie Joe with delight at one point mid-song. Decked out in a large black bow tie, ruffled shirt and dark suit, Billie Joe was clearly in his element, and the band played with such conviction and attitude that they projected right to the back of the vast auditorium in Cleveland, Ohio. It was a landmark performance, and as the clearly moved band waved and left the stage, the audience roared its approval.

By then, Green Day were already mid-way through recording their next album, their first since 2009's *21st Century Breakdown* not to feature producer Rob Cavallo at the helm. On this album, the band produced themselves, and it was also the album on which they returned to recording as a trio.

This 12th studio album would be called *Revolution Radio*. In August 2016, Billie Joe Armstrong acknowledged that *¡Uno!*, *¡Dos!* and *¡Tré!* "had no direction to them" and on *Revolution Radio,* they pursued a raw punk-pop approach.

It was a stunning return to form. The album was released on 7 October 2016 and received glowing reviews. Gwilym Mumford of *The Guardian* stated that "[after their last few albums] the

Billie Joe, Mike and Tré fun at the broadway opening for the *American Idiot* musical



Green Day playing one of their last gigs in late 2019 before that bloody pandemic hit pause on everything

'IT'S A GREAT WAY TO HAVE A GOOD TIME ALL THE TIME'

BJ ON GREEN DAY'S LOVE FOR PLAYING LIVE

band have decided to get back to basics: *Revolution Radio* is their most focused work in years".

Phil Mogredien of *The Guardian* awarded the album four out of five stars. Aaron Burgess at *Alternative Press* wrote: "It's the first time in years Green Day haven't had all the answers. But as a statement on how it really feels to fight, it's the closest to the truth they've ever gotten."

The lead single 'Bang Bang' set the tone, honing in on the everyday violence of contemporary America. Billie Joe told *Rolling Stone* that the track was about "the culture of mass shootings that happens in America, mixed with narcissistic social media".

The album shot to number one in 13 countries including the UK and the US. A world tour followed and in November 2016, while performing at the American Music Awards, the band voiced their firm opposition to the election of then-President-Elect Donald Trump by chanting "No Trump, No KKK, No Fascist USA" during their performance of 'Bang Bang'.

On 17 November 2017, the band released their second greatest hits compilation album, entitled *God's Favourite Band*. The new compilation featured 20 of their hits plus two new tracks, a different version of 'Ordinary World' from *Revolution Radio* and an unreleased song called 'Back In The USA'.

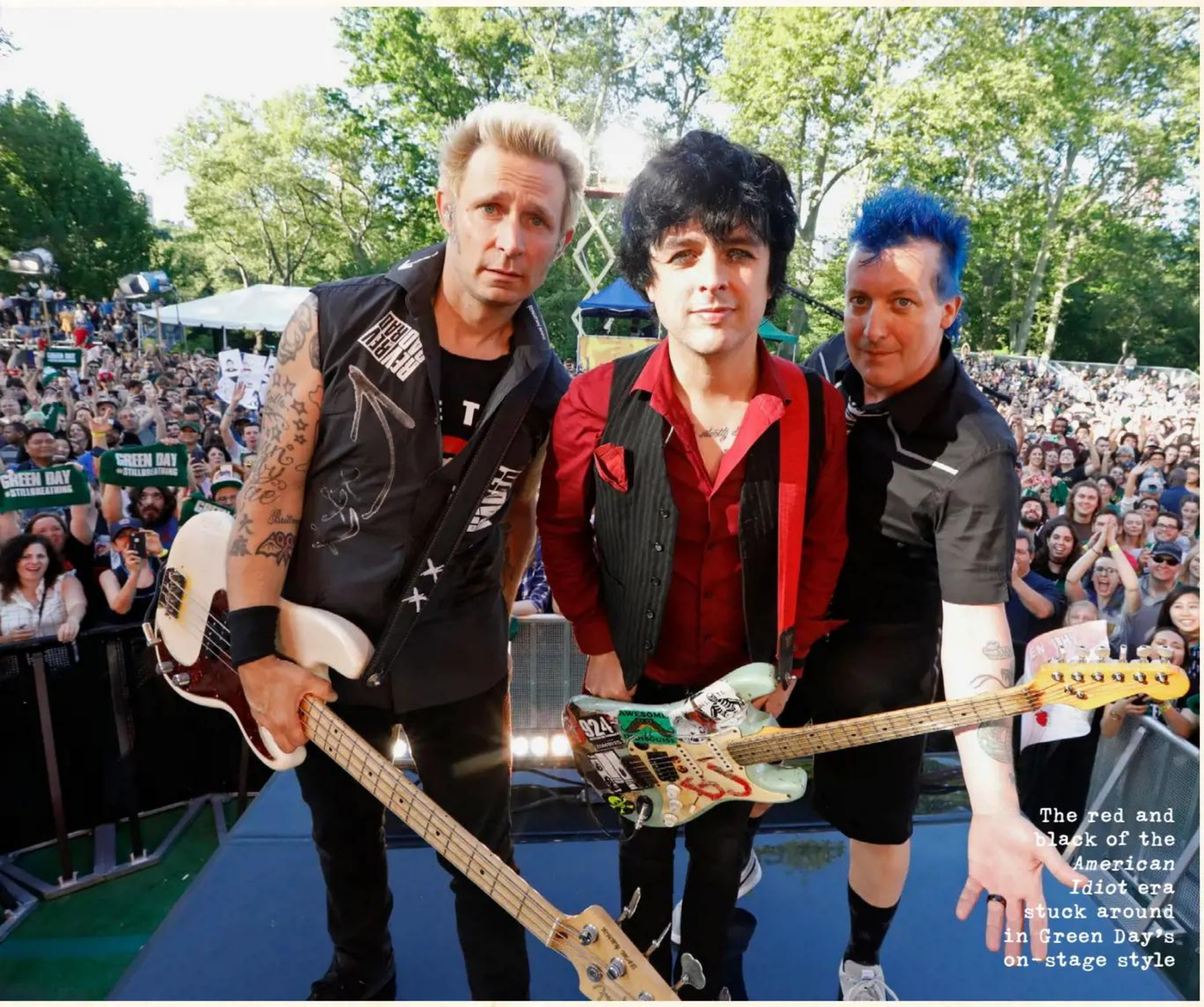
Long-time Green Day fans got another surprise on Record Store Day, on 13 April 2019, when the band released their Woodstock 1994 performance on vinyl for the first time. In September, they announced the Hella Mega tour with Fall Out Boy, Weezer and Green Day as joint headliners.

As the new decade approached, the ever-prolific Billie Joe Armstrong, Mike Dirnt and Tré Cool unveiled details of their forthcoming 13th studio album, *Father Of All Motherfuckers*, which took its stylistic cues from soul, 1960s garage, surf music and stadium rock.

By then, the band had been together for over three decades, but their studio output and live performances in recent years had reinforced their positions as a band of real merit who could still excel in the live arena. In an interview with Radio Rock Norway on 28 October 2019, they were asked what makes Green Day so special and why some have called them the best live band in the world.

"I think we feel very at home onstage," said Billie Joe. "It's a great way to have a good time all the time… we like having fun with the crowd."

It was a view echoed by Mike Dirnt. "We just get up there and have a good time," said Mike. "We get on stage, we play our songs, and it's the connection that we have with our audience that is really what makes our shows great…The music and the people at the show, that's when it comes full circle." GD



The red and black of the *American Idiot* era stuck around in Green Day's on-stage style

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

BUOYED UP BY AN ABUNDANCE OF NEW MATERIAL, GREEN DAY BOLDLY EMBARKED ON RECORDING A TRILOGY OF ALBUMS

¡Uno!, ¡Dos! & ¡Tré!

2012, Reprise

Words by Neil Crossley

Fuelled

by the unbridled energy and joy of their garage rock side project Foxboro Hot Tubs and their epic *21st Century Breakdown* world tour, Green Day entered Jingletown Studios in Oakland, California, in February 2012 and began recording new material.

Their touring guitarist and fellow Foxboro Hot Tubs member Jason White joined them, and the ever-prolific Billie Joe Armstrong was soon amassing a welter of new songs.

"This is the best music we've ever written, and the songs just keep coming," he revealed to *MTV News* in early 2012, as he announced that the band would be releasing a trilogy of albums. "We just can't help ourselves... We are going epic as fuck," he said.

So began the creation of *¡Uno!, ¡Dos!* and *¡Tré!*, three albums whose release dates were brought forward when a proposed 21-date US tour to promote the trilogy was scrapped when Billie Joe went into rehab for his addiction to alcohol and prescription medication.

Green Day's frontman stressed that the albums would be far different in style to *21st Century Breakdown* and

No one had an album trilogy on their Green Day bingo cards

American Idiot and certainly not a rock opera. The new albums, he said, would be punchy power pop and, "somewhere between AC/DC and the early Beatles".

¡UNO!

Sex, romance and rock-and-roll are pervading themes on the first album of the trilogy, which David Fricke of *Rolling Stone* described as, "12 blasts of hook-savvy mosh-pit pop".

'Nuclear Family' kicks things off: a tight, precise shot of punk made for the massess, all pummelling toms, down-the-line driving bass and raucous overdriven guitar chugs, and there's some nifty slapback echo on Billie Joe's voice.

It's classic Green Day, pacey, pounding 4/4 anthems underpinned with relentless adolescent vigour. There's a cartoon-like larger-than-life feel to the whole thing. It's feelgood, with a kind of 'schools out and looking for a party' vibe.

'Stay the Night' opens with some nicely laconic strums, before lurching into the same breakneck sonic template. It's essentially a romance, albeit one that goes for the jugular: "Well I ain't got much time / so I'll get to the point / Do you wanna share a ride and get the fuck out of this joint."

'Carpe Diem', too, continues the theme with its strong melodic hook. "Are we all too young to die?" sings Billie Joe on the chorus, although the section where the bass drops for the F# – C# chord shift under, "Making a living / Making a killing" is arguably the song's high point.

All sonic references point to the source – London, 1977, with The Clash's 'I Fought The Law' consistently springing to mind as this track flies by.

When 'Let Yourself Go', comes in with its strident thrashy dash, it's now The Ramones that spring to mind, while 'Kill The DJ' breaks step to offer something slightly slinkier. It's a highlight, darkly witty with some impressive interplay between instruments and stellar production touches.

Another stand-out moment is 'Oh Love', with its staccato chord intro and wonderfully wide, chunky, spacious sound. It's a strident piece of anthemic power pop and when released as the lead single, shot to number one on the *Billboard 200* chart.

Released on 25 September 2012, *¡Uno!* fared well commercially, debuting at number two in the US and the UK charts. Critical reception was mixed. Melissa Maerz of *Entertainment Weekly* called the album, "a welcome switch from high concept to high energy" in one of the positive assessments, while *Mojo* recommended the album to fans of Green Day's first major-label album *Dookie*, adding "Your favourite slacker-punks are, briefly, back".

But other outlets were far from convinced. Andy Gill of *The Independent* newspaper criticised, "Green Day's devotion to the most basic of rock formats", and he went on in his review to describe the music as little more than, "patronising corporate rock masquerading, in sweary adolescent anthems as somehow anti-establishment."

¡DOS!

In an interview on the Guitar Center website, Billie Joe and Mike Dirnt said that the second album from their trilogy was going to be similar to their side project Foxboro Hot Tubs and "more garage rock – a little dirtier, like you're in the middle of the party".

In fact, so similar is it at times to Foxboro Hot Tubs that Billie Joe allegedly called *¡Dos!* the second Foxboro album.

Jingletown Studios in Oakland, California, was the location for the recording, which got underway on 14 February 2012 and concluded on 26 June. This was the band's tenth studio album, and it opens with 'See You Tonight', a folk-based track, reminiscent of Simon & Garfunkel. Lo-fi strumming, on what sounds like an unamplified electric guitar intros the track before close harmonies enter the mix. There's some nice break-up on Billie Joe's reverb-soaked vocal, which adds texture to the sound.

Thumping toms introduce 'Fuck Time', which was originally performed as a Foxboro Hot Tubs song. It's a fuzz guitar-fuelled stomper, more akin to the glistening post-punk tracks the band became known for. They may have been aiming for garage rock, but the sound is way too precise and measured, and the song is too impeccably produced for that.

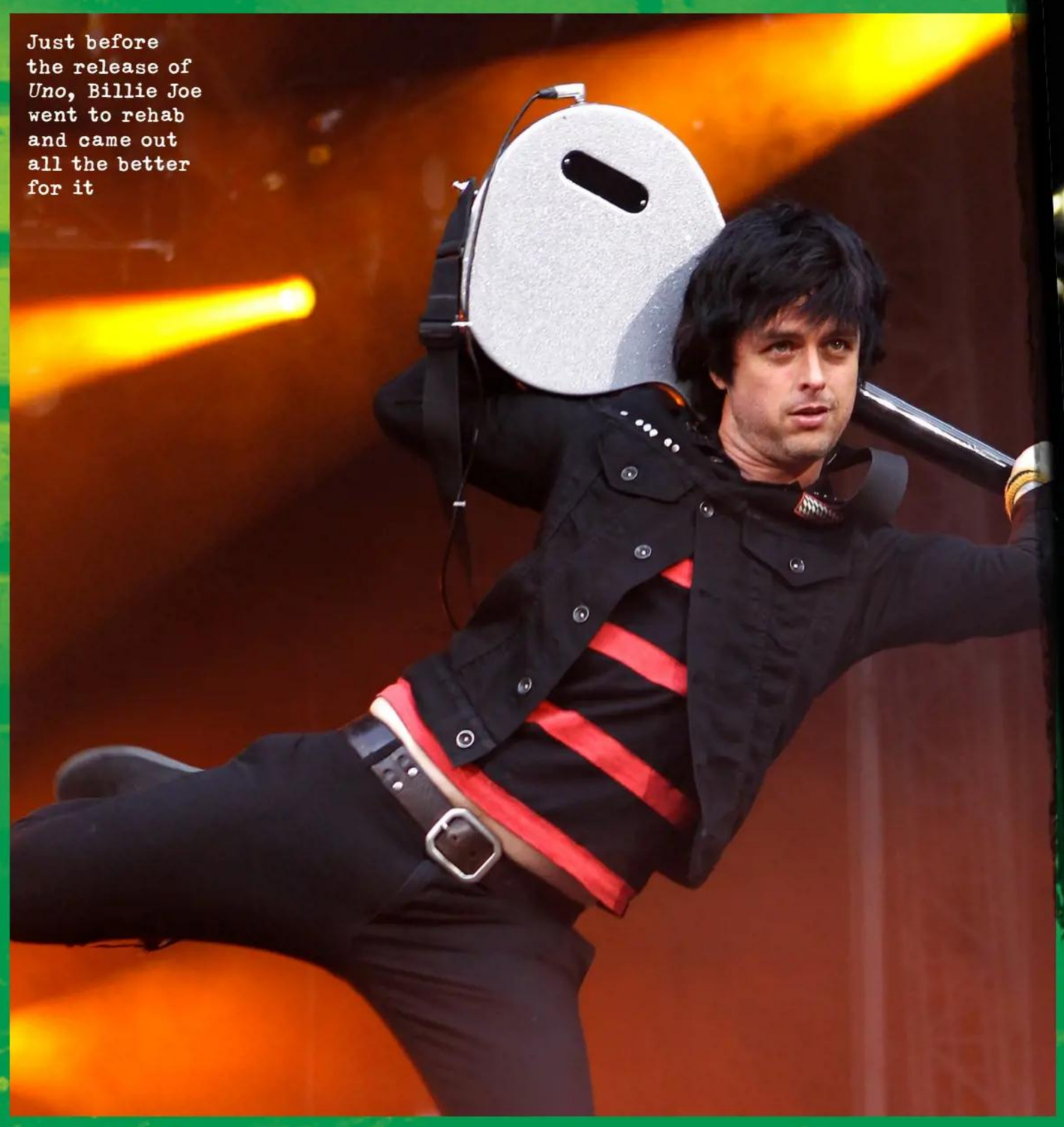
'Makeout Party' is similarly self-explanatory and hurtles along at the same breakneck pace. 'Ashley', meanwhile, is a real 4/4 belter, a strident track with a sense of urgency, which focuses on unrequited love/lust.

The vibe shifts for 'Nightlife', which awkwardly features verses from rapper Lady Cobra, while 'Amy', the album's closing track, is a touching, if rather slight, tribute to Amy Winehouse.

'Stray Heart' is an unashamed toe-tapping pop track with oodles of space and a refreshingly upbeat spirit. Lyrically, it ventures little from the kind of Bobby Vee romantic fare of the 1950s, but it works. "I said a thousand times, and now a thousand one / We'll never part / I'll never stray again from you / This dog is destined for a home to your heart".

¡Dos! received generally positive reviews, but some found its music dull and brimming with filler tracks. "Oddly leaden and rather witless," is how Phil

THIS IS THE BEST MUSIC WE HAVE EVER WRITTEN, AND THE SONGS JUST KEEP COMING



Just before the release of *Uno*, Billie Joe went to rehab and came out all the better for it

Dos cover star Mike said the album has a more garage rock feel to it

are some real sonic gems such as the opening song, 'Brutal Love', which melds soul, doo-wop and stadium rock into a soaring waltztime classic.

At its core, 'Brutal Love' is a strings-and horns-adorned torch song on which Billie Joe unleashes one of his most impassioned and natural vocal performances ever.

The track feels poetic and heartfelt. "Turn out the lights / Close your eyes / Turn up the silence / The heartache of your life / Dance forever / Under the lights / This brutal love."

Another highlight, and arguably the best track on the album, is 'X-Kid', which was written in response to the 2009 suicide of a close friend of Billie Joe's, who he grew up with in Rodeo, California. The song is as much about the whole Generation X demographic, with Billie Joe focusing on the struggles of growing older. This track soars and Billie Joe's crunching guitar tone on the infectious riff has rarely sounded as warm, gritty and vital.

As always with Green Day, for every positive review you could find a negative one, but there was an overriding sense that on this final instalment of the trilogy, they had risen to the occasion. Ryan Reed of *Paste* magazine wrote that *¡Tré!* was "more raw, pointed and hard-hitting than anything they've released in years" while *Kerrang!* concluded that it was "the best of the bunch". GD

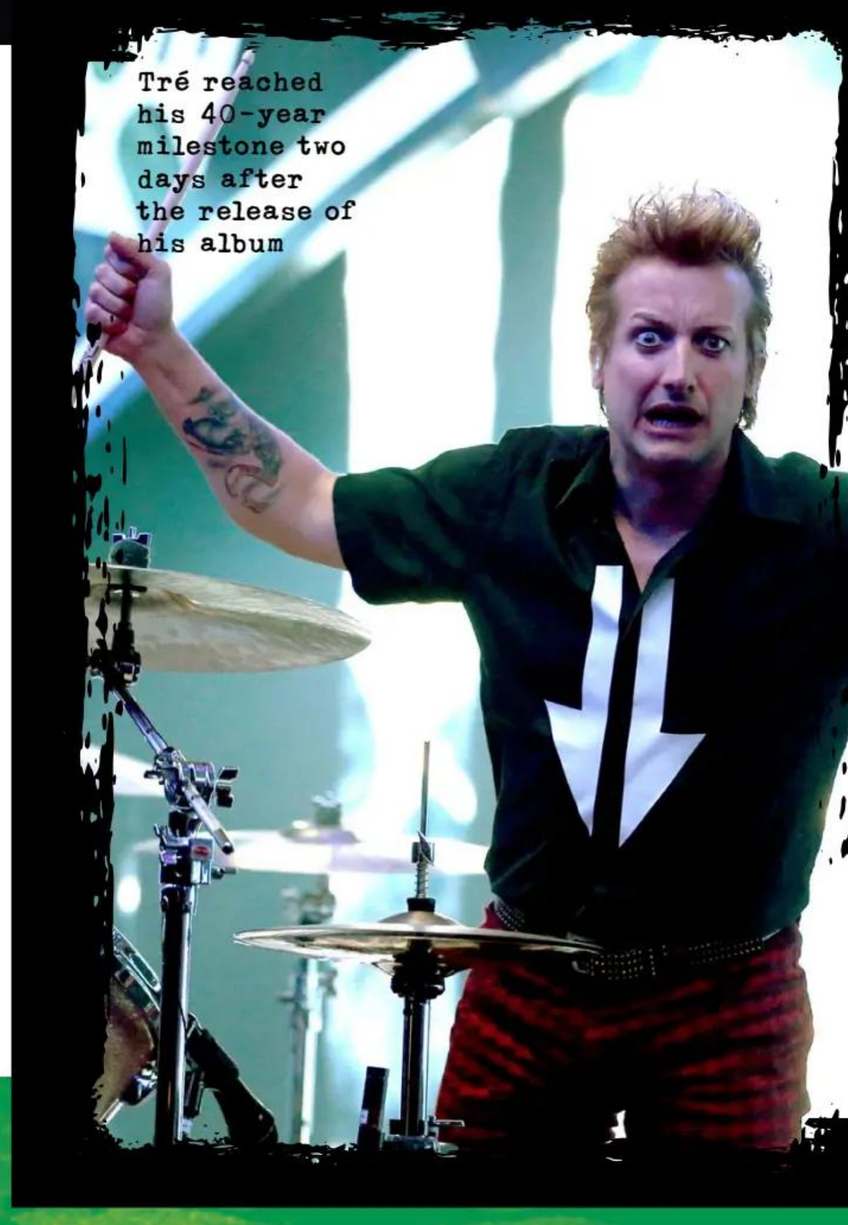
Mongredien of *The Guardian* viewed the album. Stephen Thomas Erlewine of *AllMusic*, meanwhile, called it "a high-octane collection of garage pop and hooky punk" adding that *¡Dos!* was ultimately a "terrific little party record".

¡TRÉ!

The final instalment follows the power pop style of *¡Uno!* as well as the garage rock objectives of *¡Dos!*. "The third is supposed to be epic," Billie Joe told *Rolling Stone* in July 2012. 'With the first album, you're getting in the mood to party. On the second one, you're at the party. And the third album, you're cleaning up the mess."

Producer Rob Cavallo told *Rolling Stone* in July 2012 that the band wanted to return the back-to-basics approach found *Dookie*. "We also wanted to go pre-*Dookie*, back to our love of 1950s and 1960s music, close-to-the-bone rock-and-roll. You don't hear a gazillion parts. The majority of this is drums, bass, two guitars and vocals."

There's a cohesion and consistency to *¡Tré!* that its two predecessors lack. And while there are certainly mediocre tracks, such as 'Missing You' – another palm-muted melodic guitar chugger with a Replacements-esque feel – 'Sex, Drugs & Violence' and 'A Little Boy Named Train', there



Tré reached his 40-year milestone two days after the release of his album

A WIDELY REGARDED RETURN TO FORM AS GREEN DAY LEAVE THEIR AMBITIOUS TRILOGY BEHIND THEM AND GO BACK TO BASICS

Revolution Radio

2016, Reprise

After the ambitious yet patchily received trilogy of *¡Uno!* *¡Dos!* and *¡Tré!*, Green Day chose to go back to basics for their 12th studio album, *Revolution Radio*.

For most fans and critics, it was a welcome return to form, one which saw the band doing what they did best, playing short, sharp impactful songs with soaring hooks, all imbued with political intent.

Lyrically, the album reflects on the increased polarisation within American society at a time when Donald Trump was inching towards the White House. The band self-produced the album and returned to being a trio, after swelling their ranks on *¡Uno! ¡Dos!* and *¡Tré!* with the addition of their long-time touring guitarist Jason White.

Interestingly, on the last day of 2015, Billie Joe Armstrong posted a rare tweet in which he vowed in 2016 to "destroy the phrase 'pop-punk' forever". As it turned out, he didn't quite achieve this on *Revolution Radio* as melodic radio-friendly pop-punk abounds. But he did ensure that the band emerged with a solid 12-track album that hung together well and reaffirmed Green Day's reason for being 30 years into their careers.

Billie Joe began working on new material in the studio he built in Oakland, California, in 2014, which he named Otis. The first song he wrote was 'Bang, Bang', which became the lead single and set the tone for the album. It's a raw, primitive track, arguably the band's heaviest, powering along at 127 bpm, propelled by Tré's thunderous drums.

Billie Joe told *Rolling Stone* that the song is about "the culture of mass shootings that happens in America, mixed with narcissistic social media". He also described the song as "the most aggressive single we've ever had" in a chat with Illinois radio station WJBD.

The lyrics are certainly direct: "Bang bang, give me fame / Shoot me up to entertain / I am a semi-automatic lonely boy / You're dead / I'm well fed."

The song received positive reviews when released as a single on 11 August 2016. "The song is Green Day at their punky best," read a review in *Gigwise*. "It's far more in line with the intensity of stuff on *Dookie* than the ballads on *American Idiot*."

The Black Lives Matter movement is referenced in the album's title track, another breakneck-paced song with Billie Joe's palm-muted staccato guitar crunch dominating the mix.

The opening track 'Somewhere Now' begins with atmospheric guitar swells and plaintive acoustic guitar, while Billie Joe's vocal on the opening lines has an endearing rasp, which adds to the lyrical sentiment. The song focuses on his post-rehab struggles. It's one of the few times he has referenced this period, which makes it all the more personal and poignant. "How did a life on the wild side / Ever get so dull," he sings.

Wedged between the breakneck sonic onslaught are some intimate and personal songs from Billie Joe. The narrative on 'Still Breathing' hones in on a dying drug addict, a wounded soldier and a destitute gambler, while the closing ballad 'Ordinary World' is simple and affecting. Then there are tracks such as 'Bouncing Off The Wall' and 'Youngblood', which offer a far lighter brand of punk tones.

Admittedly, some of the political lyrical content across the album sounds naive at times, hanging on easy buzzwords and clichés rather than incisive observations. But it's heartfelt, and Billie Joe conveys a real indignant anger at what is happening to America.

Revolution Radio was released on 7 October 2016 and was one of their most focused and cohesive albums for years. The album shot to number one in the US and UK and went to the top spot in 11 other countries, including Italy, Sweden, Canada, South Korea and Greece.

Pitchfork noted that Green Day had gone from pop-punks to rock stars but noted, "Their latest, however, has little effect on their legacy and lapses into pandering, embarrassing lyrical misfires". But many critics welcomed the album with open arms. *The Atlantic* called it "a short and catchy blend of political anger and personal wistfulness", while Phil Mongredien in *The Guardian* concluded that *Revolution Radio* was Green Day's "most coherent album since 2004's *American Idiot*.

The band embarked on a world tour to promote the album, and in November 2016, they performed at the American Music Awards in Los Angeles. During their performance of 'Bang, Bang' at the awards show, they made a marked political statement about Donald Trump, chanting, "No Trump, No KKK, No Fascist USA," during their rendition of the song.

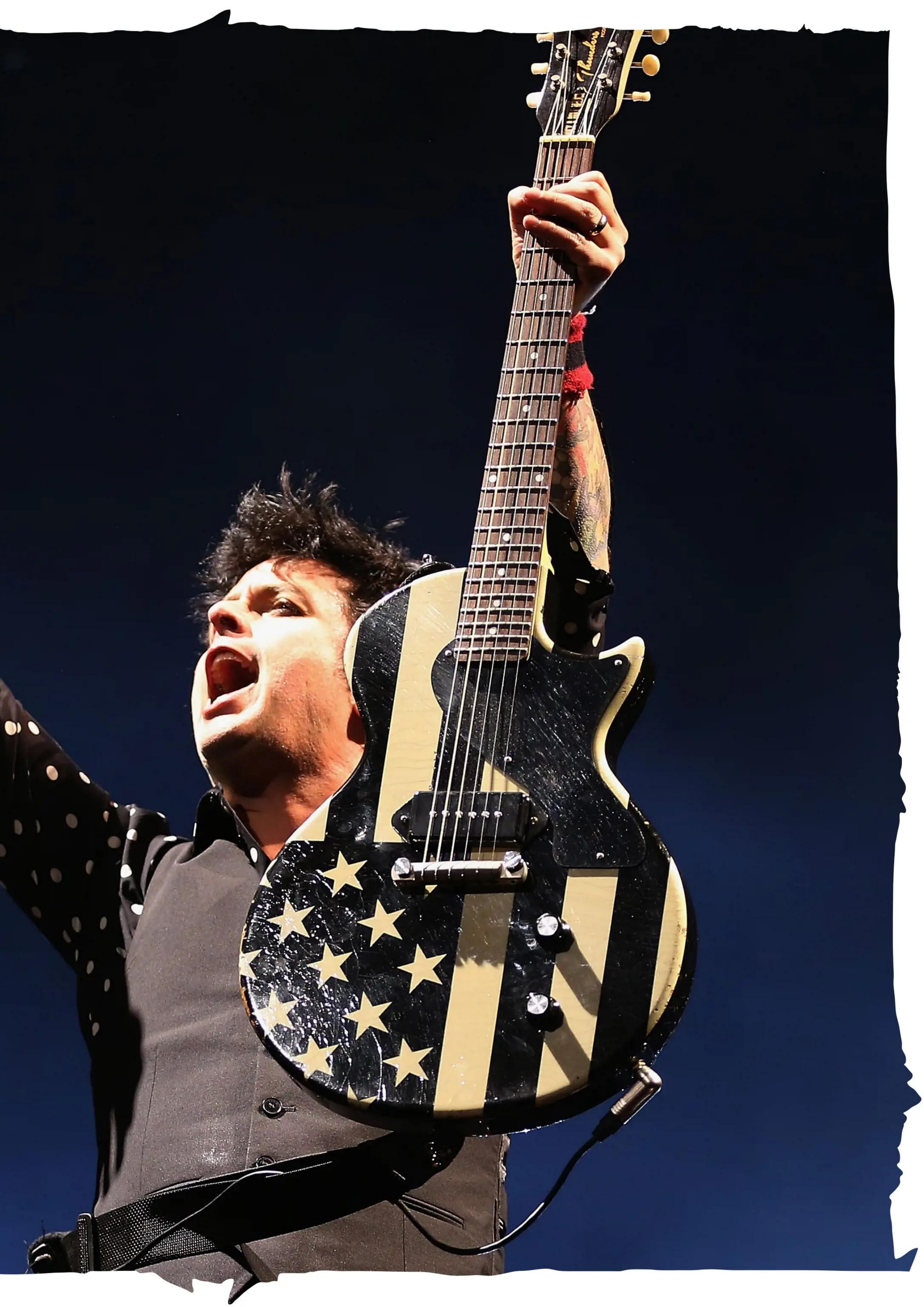
In a review of the album in *Alternative Press*, Aaron Burgess noted, "It's the first time in years Green Day haven't had all the answers. But as a statement on how it feels to fight, it's the closest to the truth they've ever gotten." GD

Revolution Radio

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

The trio opted to produce the album themselves

THE GREEN DAY SOUND MIGHT HAVE EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS BUT PUNK IS STILL THE BEATING HEART OF THE BAND



KEEP ON KEEPING ON

Almost four decades since they formed, Green Day's appeal remains as enduring as ever

Words by Neil Crossley

Green

Day ushered in the new decade with their 13th studio album, *Father of All Motherfuckers*, released on 7 February 2020.

On this album, the band shifted away from their typical punk-tinged sound, veering instead towards garage rock, similar to their album *¡Dos!*. The album was recorded between June and September 2019 with co-producers Butch Walker and Chris Dugan.

Speaking to Zane Lowe on Beats 1 (now Apple Music 1) about the tone of the new album, Billie Joe Armstrong divulged: "There's a lot of depression but with a sense of humour. But also just kind of the way the world works right now where we live in just the time of complete and total chaos – or else we've always been, but now it's turned up to Trump. So it's just trying to reflect what's going on."

Stylistically, the album spanned a broad range of influences. "*Father of all [Motherfuckers]* feels like it's somewhere in between Prince and MC5," Billie Joe told Patrick Ryan of *USA Today* in February 2020, adding that the band wanted to make a "sort of old-timey rock-and-roll record that traces the history of rock-and-roll". Billie Joe said Green Day's new album was inspired by glam rock artists such as "T. Rex and Mott The Hoople, as well as soul artists such as Martha and the Vandellas, and some garage rock".

Kendrick Lamar was one unexpected influence. "We wanted to create a dance groove with space between the drums and vocals [inspired by] the way Kendrick Lamar does things or old-school Motown music," Billie Joe told *Billboard*.

Reviews of the album skewed towards the positive end of the scale. *Kerrang!* and *Rolling Stone* both awarded the album four out of five stars. Jon Dolan of *Rolling Stone* named it one of Green Day's most fun albums. But some other critics were not as bowled over. *Sputnikmusic* gave the album just 1.5 out of five stars, calling the album "a hot mess that destroys any hope that Green Day could re-emerge as a band worth listening to".

Father of All Motherfuckers performed well, topping the UK Albums Chart, reaching number one in the *Billboard* 200 chart and entering the top ten in 15 countries. Green Day were in good shape, creatively and commercially, and were looking forward to getting on the road with the new album.

The Hella Mega tour Green Day had announced in September 2019, with Fall Out Boy and Weezer as co-headliners was due to get underway from March to August 2020, with 26 shows across the US and Europe. But all their plans would soon come to a juddering halt. One month earlier, on 20 January 2020, the first confirmed case of the Covid-19 virus was reported in Washington State. By 26 March, *New York Times* data showed that the US had the highest number of known cases of any country. By 19 April, the number of deaths from Covid-19 in the US had reached 20,000.

For Billie Joe Armstrong, the emotional impact of the disease hit home early when, on 2 April 2020, Adam Schlesinger, the bassist and founding member of Fountains of Wayne died from Covid-19. One week later, country singer John Prine, too, succumbed to the disease, which also proved fatal.

"Covid was, and still is, just ravaging through America," Billie Joe told the *NME*. "You start seeing good people die from it. Adam is one, and John Prine is another."

As a tribute to Adam Schlesinger, Billie Joe recorded a version of 'That Thing You Do' for a lockdown series entitled *No Fun Mondays* on his YouTube channel. Adam wrote the song for the Tom Hanks' 1996 music comedy film of the same name. "I've always had so much respect for Adam as a songwriter," said Billie Joe, "and I just love this song."

By April 2020, Billie Joe Armstrong, Mike Dirnt and Tré Cool were adjusting to a new existence of lockdowns and quarantine. Like many artists, Billie Joe was using the enforced isolation as a

Billie Joe covered 'That Thing You Do!' from the Tom Hanks film as a tribute to writer Adam Schlesinger

Billie Joe released his *No Fun Mondays* cover series as an album in November 2020

'I FEEL PRETTY LOST IN ALL OF THIS'

BILLIE JOE FEELS THE LOCKDOWN BLUES

chance to take stock and create, as he told *Kerrang!* in an interview published on 6 April 2020.

"I've been writing a lot of music, and I had all these melodies in my head, so I wrote, like, six songs since all of this has been going on," he said. "I don't know when I can get together with Mike and Tré, but I told them to make sure that they're quarantined for now, and then I hope down the road we can get back in the studio with Butch Walker."

Billie Joe said he had been spending his time "indoors like everyone else on the planet right now, waiting around to see what happens next!" Reading, hanging out with his dogs, watching episodes of *The Office* and his punk and rock-and-roll documentaries had all been welcome distractions, he said.

"[My wife] Adrienne and I have just been stuck in the house the whole time," Billie Joe told *Kerrang!* "I feel pretty lost in all of this. I think a lot of people are trying to do the right thing and be with their families and friends as much as they can. It's been hard because I wasn't able to see [my two sons] Joey or Jakob at first as they were touring Europe. We had to keep a distance, and it's just been me and Adrienne. When you have that separation, you realise that we take for granted some of the things that matter most to us."

Busy as ever, Billie Joe appeared on several talk shows, such as *Good Morning America* on 5 June 2020. By contrast, Mike Dirnt and Tré Cool stayed relatively quiet, but that all changed in June 2020, when Green Day released a cover of Blondie's 'Dreaming', a faithful yet punchier, crunching power chord-filled rendition of the Chris Stein and Debbie Harry-penned 1979 hit.

Four months later, in October 2020, the band resurrected their secret incognito side project, The Network, after a break of 15 years, teasing news of upcoming activity with a video entitled *The Prophecy*. An EP *Trans Am* was released on 20 November 2020, and a sequel album *Money Money Money 2020 Part II: We Told Ya So!* followed on 4 December 2020.

Green Day mischievously continued to deny any involvement with The Network. "All I gotta say is fuck The Network," said Billie Joe. "These guys are totally spreading rumours." But as a number of journalists pointed out, the vocals sounded uncannily like Billie Joe and all three members of Green Day were cited as songwriters for the album *Money, Money, Money 2020* by the band's publisher.

Although Covid continued to threaten live work, 2021 found Green Day back to something resembling normal activity. On 21 February 2021, they released a single 'Here Comes The Shock' and in March, on the 25th anniversary of *Insomniac*, they dropped a remastered version with bonus live tracks. On 17 May 2021, they released the single 'Pollyanna', an uplifting, guitar-chugging 4/4 stomper.

‘WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF ROCK-AND-ROLL’

MIKE ON GREEN DAY’S MESSAGE

The trio changed a lyric of ‘American Idiot’ to protest Trump

“Better days are looking up the road, and to celebrate, we just dropped a brand-new song,” announced the band. The vibe was upbeat. “I think it’s time to pull the shades,” sings Billie Joe. “It’s wonderful to be alive”.

The song was released to coincide with the rescheduled Hella Mega tour. And sure enough, on 24 July at the Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas, the US leg of the tour finally got underway, concluding in Seattle on 6 September 2021 before kicking off the European leg at the Ernst-Happel-Stadion in Vienna on 19 June 2022 and ending in Paris on 2 July 2022.

All three headlining bands, Green Day, Fall Out Boy and Weezer, performed at the US shows, although Fall Out Boy were forced to cancel the New York and Boston dates due to a positive Covid-19 case in their touring party. Like all bands, the shutdown of live performance opportunities during Covid only heightened the electric anticipation and excitement of being back onstage.

“There are 75,000 people here,” bellowed Billie Joe Armstrong during their performance at the London Stadium on 4 June 2022. “How the hell did this happen?!”

As the band strode triumphantly out on stage, Billie Joe launched into the opening riff of ‘American Idiot’ and the crowd went wild.

“A genuinely unreal run of singles follows,” wrote Emily Carter and Luke Morton in a review of the show in *Kerrang!* magazine, “(seriously, what other bands can then play ‘Holiday’, ‘Know Your Enemy’, ‘Boulevard of Broken Dreams’, ‘Longview’ and ‘Welcome to Paradise’ all in a row?!), with plenty of crowd interaction, a few ‘weeeeey-ohhhhh’s and thousands of phone lights in the air rounding out the full stadium show experience – something that Green Day have been pros at for literal decades now, and a skill that’s clearly not been lost in their time away.”

Much of the show’s setlist honed in on the period from the breakthrough album *Dookie* (1994) to 2009’s epic *21st Century Breakdown*, with unexpected highlights such as a cover of Kiss’s ‘Rock and Roll All Nite’. Billie Joe Armstrong started to bid farewell to the crowd with a solo rendition of ‘Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)’ before the band launched into a moving rendition of

GREEN DAY WERE SO CONFIDENT IN SAVIORS THEY BILLED IT AS A SUCCESSOR TO THE LIKES OF DOOKIE AND AMERICAN IDIOT

Green Day ready to usher in 2024 at *Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve*

'All the Young Dudes' to bring the show to an end.

That year also saw the band perform at some major US festivals, such as Lollapalooza and Outside Lands. As ever, their studio activity continued at a pace. In November 2022, they announced they were working on a new album with producer Rob Cavallo, who had worked with the band on many of their landmark releases.

On 19 October 2023, they played the new album's opening song and first single 'The American Dream is Killing Me', during a live show in Las Vegas. That same month, the title of the forthcoming album, *Saviors*, was revealed.

On New Year's Eve, Green Day performed 'American Idiot' on the TV special *Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve*. When he got to the line, "I'm not a part of a redneck agenda", Billie Joe replaced it with "I'm not a part of the MAGA agenda", referencing former President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" rhetoric.

Billie Joe switched the lyric again on 16 January 2024 when the band made a surprise performance at the 47th-50th Streets-Rockefeller Centre subway station in New York, for an episode of *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, with the talk show host on tambourine. The band played 'Look Ma, No Brains!' and 'Basket Case' among other tracks, with Billie Joe leaving a space for the crowd to sing the same amended lyric on the final track 'American Idiot'.

Saviors, the band's 14th studio album finally dropped on 19 January 2024. It reached the top five in 13 countries, hitting number one on the UK album charts and number four on the US *Billboard* 200. It was a remarkable achievement. 37 years after forming, Green Day had demonstrated yet again that their sonic sensibilities were as sharp as ever.

Critics lapped the album up, and reviews were more uniformly positive compared to *Father of All Motherfuckers*. Andrew Trendell in the *NME* concluded that it was the band's best album since *American Idiot*. He went on to add that *Saviors* was "an act of defiance met with a shrug; a band saying, 'We're still here and we're still fucked.'" *Uncut* meanwhile observed that the band had "unleashed 15 compact, primarily pro forma bangers".

The subsequent tour started in Santiago de Compostela on 30 May 2024 and will wind up in London on 29 June. On 29 July, they kick off the US leg in Washington DC, ending in San Diego on 28 September 2024.

In an interview with *DIY* magazine in March 2024, the band reflected on their longevity and their ability to remain ahead of the game, almost four decades after first stepping up on stage.

"For some reason, we're always able to create the next era and it has become so generational," observed Billie Joe Armstrong. "I think it's the energy of the music, the way we play together. It's me, Mike and Tré – our own characters that all shine." It was a view echoed by Mike Dirnt. "We believe in the power of rock-and-roll," he reflected. "When everything else in the world is going to shit, the three of us can get in a room and have a language of our own. Everybody else should be so lucky." GD

Tré, Billie Joe and Mike performing post-lockdown in Las Vegas in 202I

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

GREEN DAY ADOPT AN APOLITICAL STANCE ON THIS GLEEFUL AND RAUCOUS ALBUM, WHICH EXHIBITS REAL PANACHE

Father of All Motherfuckers

2020, Reprise

On this, their 13th album, Green set out to make what Billie Joe Armstrong described as a "sort of old-timey rock-and-roll record that traces the history of rock-and-roll".

Speaking to *USA Today*, Billie Joe cited T. Rex, Mott the Hoople and Martha and the Vandellas as influences, adding that the album "feels like it's somewhere between Prince and MC5".

It was certainly a raucous album and one on which the band put their politics on hold. In an interview with the *NME* in February 2020, Billie Joe explained the apolitical stance: "It was just too obvious… We live in really dangerous times right now. Everything feels sort of unpredictable. America is really fucked up, and it's hard to draw any inspiration from it because it just depresses me."

The band's choice of producer was Butch Walker, whose credits include Taylor Swift and Carly Rae Jepsen. "Ultimately, I think the band was ready for a change," said Butch in an interview on the Universal Audio website. "For a decade, they'd basically been producing their own records. I know what that's like… it can be one big rabbit hole you go down, using the same tricks and the same techniques over and over again."

Words by Neil Crossley

The album drew on 1970s glam and garage rock, influences shared by both Billie Joe and Butch. "Billie and I both share a deep affinity for 1970s glam rock and punk rock, but Green Day have never been able to explore the glam side of that equation on record… When Billie first sent me the demo for 'Oh Yeah!', he had put the sample of Joan Jett's version of 'Do You Wanna Touch Me (Oh Yeah)' in there, and I don't know if he was even that excited about that one, but I told him, 'No, man, that's the jam.'"

'Oh Yeah!' melds 1970s glam influences and a thumping drum beat from Tré with more contemporary digital sounds. The track is essentially synth-pop with a rock-and-roll attitude. Butch creates heaps of space within the mix, and Billie Joe's vocals shine through. Butch told *Sound On Sound* magazine that he treated the vocal with a "cool weird H910 Harmonizer vocal swish" to get a period feel. He then added a thudding stomp sample to the kick drum "plus some tape slap echo on the drums, the toms and everything… to get that 'Bennie and the Jets' meets 'Ballroom Blitz' [sound]".

The guitar sound also had a major shift. Instead of the walls of stacked guitars, Butch Walker opted for single-tracked parts. "Billie loves to stack guitars, and he makes it sound great… but one of the things I talked with him about was that quality you hear on a lot of older records."

Since 2007, the band toured their garage rock side project Foxboro Hot Tubs, which really loosened them up for this album. You can feel the blissful abandon on tracks such as 'Junkies on a High', with its deep, dark groove, and 'Graffitia', a strident, thumping track with a strong 1970s glam-pop feel.

'Stab You in the Heart' sounds like 'Hippy Hippy Shake' through a bank of distortion pedals, while 'Meet Me on the Roof' with its high-in-the-mix handclaps is a stunning piece of wry, carefree pop. "I'm crawling on the dance floor (dance floor) / I think I lost my phone / I'm feeling like a toothache (toothache) / My face is going numb."

'Fire, Ready, Aim' meanwhile is a cracking slice of garage rock, which lurches forward at a breakneck pace, as does 'Take the Money and Crawl', with its infectious zeal and soaring live feel.

"ROCK HAS LOST ITS BALLS," SAID GREEN DAY WHEN ANNOUNCING THE ALBUM. "WE'RE GONNA TEABAG ALL THESE MOTHERFUCKERS"

The album is fast, furious and gleeful. There is a genuine sense of unabashed joy and abandon across its ten tracks and 25-minute running time. It's wry, witty and almost cartoon-like at times, but the band's conviction shines through.

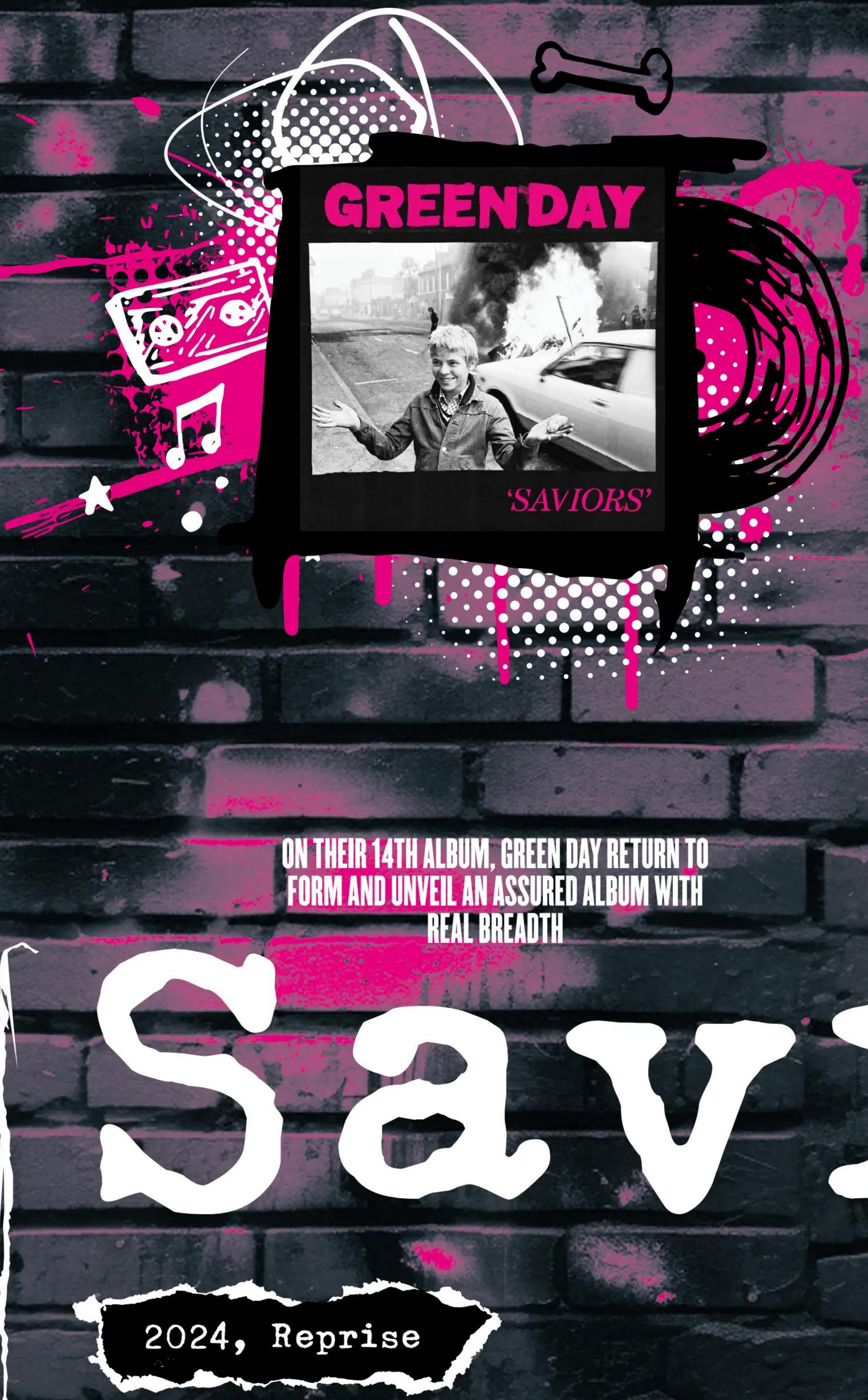
Butch Walker's production is sublime. The album brims with inspired production flourishes, such as at 2:28 on 'Meet Me on the Roof', where the whole track collapses down to a lo-fi transistor-like mix in the closing seconds.

Father of All Motherfuckers was a significant sonic shift for Green Day – one which the critics and fans ate up, for the most part. The album hit number one on the UK Album charts and four on the US *Billboard* 200. "Green Day deliver everything with such panache that the songs' limitations don't really matter," wrote Phil Mongredien in *The Guardian*, "especially when they manage to make tired old tropes seem fresh, as on the swooning brilliance of 'Take the Money and Crawl' and 'Meet Me on the Roof'."

It wasn't all positive, however, and critics took fire at Green Day for being too complacent. "They've lost none of their enthusiasm or technical skills. What they have lost, though, is any sense of originality, intrigue, or pertinence," wrote Jordan Blum for *PopMatters* in one of the kinder critical reviews. Despite the naysayers, the album wins out with its reckless enthusiasm. It's a frenetic all-out-attack that spotlights some of Green Day's lesser-known inspirations. GD

Billie Joe designed the album art by defacing a copy of *American Idiot*

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images



ON THEIR 14TH ALBUM, GREEN DAY RETURN TO FORM AND UNVEIL AN ASSURED ALBUM WITH REAL BREADTH

Savi

2024, Reprise

SAVIORS

The year 2024 is a significant one for Green Day. It marks three decades since the band released their landmark major-label *Dookie* album, a release which went on to sell over 20 million copies. This year also marks the 20th anniversary of *American Idiot*, the band's ambitious rock opera album.

There are strong echoes of both those landmark albums on *Saviors*, the band's 14th studio album, which dropped on 19 January 2024. Somewhat fittingly, Rob Cavallo, the producer on both *Dookie* and *American Idiot* is back in the producer's chair for *Saviors*.

"Billie called Rob and said, 'Hey, how you doing?' And Rob was like, 'Are you ready to make rock-and-roll history again?'" recalled Mike Dirnt in an interview with *DIY* magazine. "I think Billie was just calling to see if he wanted to grab lunch or something, but when Rob's hungry to record, it's always good. We're a good team when we're firing on all cylinders."

On this album, the band chose to record in London at RAK Studios – a decision made almost by chance, as Billie Joe Armstrong was visiting family in the UK. Before long, Mike Dirnt and Tré Cool had headed over for some very casual and low-key sessions.

"It was a lot of fun," Tré Cool told *DIY* magazine. "We were focused on being together, both as a band and as friends, in this new environment. There was a real excitement and a real revitalised energy we had going into it."

It was a view echoed by Billie Joe in an interview with *Vulture* in January 2024. "We wanted to get out of the US and do something different. We found RAK Studios in St. John's Wood. We loved it immediately. Just a breath of fresh air. A different place where we could focus and then go to the pub and hang out or go walking through Regent's Park. It's just a change of atmosphere that I thought was important to us. Plus, we have a lot of British influence in our music, from the British invasion to glam to the first wave of punk that came out of London. Even Britpop."

Tré Cool and his family chose to live in a luxury two-storey Airbnb in Knightsbridge. Every day, he would put on a suit and walk to the studio. Then he would change into a T-shirt and "play my

Billie Joe's political lyrics returned with a vengeance

Tré walked to the studio every day dressed to the nines

The band chose to record out of the US and found London the be the ideal crucible for their new music

ass off". When finished, he would change back into his suit and walk home.

"I genuinely would dress smart and wear a suit, because it's London," he told *Louder Than Sound*. But then I'd hang my stuff up and get changed, and put on my lucky socks, my lucky pants, and the same shirt… it was quite smelly at the end."

The relaxed vibe was reflected one Saturday evening when Billie Joe popped into a bar called Slim Jim's Liquor Store in Upper Street, Islington, north London, where a covers band was playing. Billie Joe ended up jumping up onstage when the band launched into one of Green Day's biggest hits – an event that went viral on social media.

"I was out with my wife. We were like, 'Let's go to Slim Jim's.' We walk in and there's a covers band playing a Red Hot Chilli Peppers song. Then they play Alanis Morissette. I say, 'If they play 'Basket Case', I'm getting up there.' I *never* do things like that, but sure enough, the very next song was 'Basket Case', and I ran up and almost gave the lead singer a heart attack. I felt like an Elvis impersonator the way they looked at me, but it was really fun. The whole crowd was into it, and it was a total surprise."

On *Father of All Motherfuckers*, Green Day ditched the politics, but on *Saviors*, it returns with a vengeance. Green Day released *Saviors* at a time when America is increasingly polarised, with Donald Trump once again looking like a possible contender for the Oval Office. In an irony not lost on the band, this divided nation was also the focus of *American Idiot*, which reflected on the wreckage left by the presidency of George W. Bush.

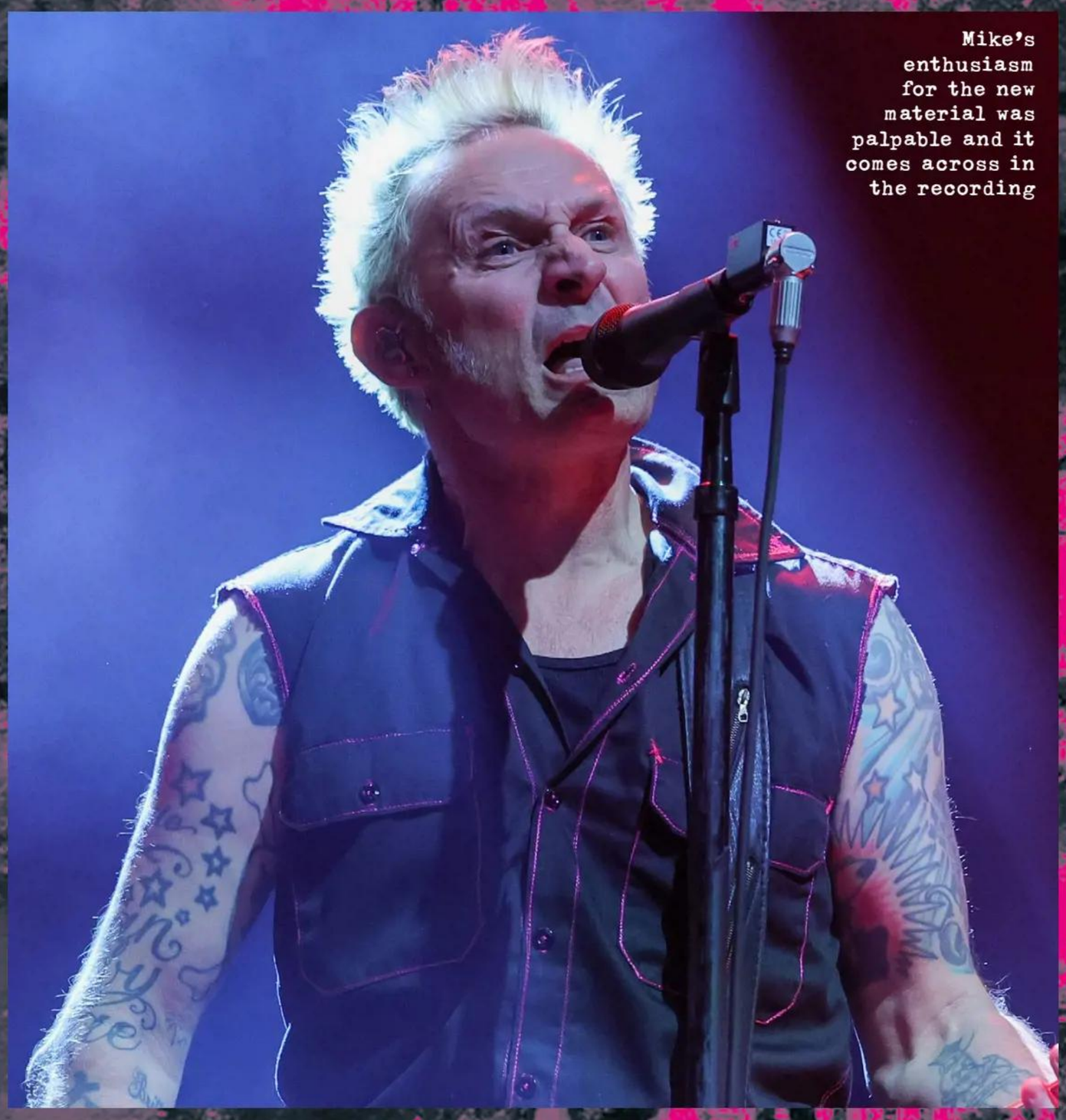
The band's concerns about contemporary America fuel the themes of *Saviors*, focusing on repercussions such as the homelessness epidemic. The band nailed their colours firmly to the mast on the album's opening track 'The American Dream is Killing Me', a soaring anthem with a powerful shuffle beat.

In an interview with Ayesha Rascoe of Washington DC-based NPR (National Public Radio) in January 2024, Billie Joe discussed the inspiration for this song. "I think being in California and seeing, like, houseless people just on the street and people without options in life and the cost of living going up, it, like, creates that chaos and depression that is sort of what the song sort of reflects."

Billie Joe explained why he feels the American Dream needs to be redefined. "It's like the working class has become sort of a service industry, and we're not really giving very many options to people. You know, in the 1970s, my dad was a truck driver. He was a teamster. My mom was a waitress. Six kids in the house, and they were able to afford their own home. But I think now I don't really see that being very feasible for a lot of people."

At 1:02 the track drops down to just lush strings, as Billie Joe sings a vocal refrain over the endearing top-line melody. "People on the street / Unemployed and obsolete / Did you ever learn to read the ransom note?" It's a storming track, and the lyrics are direct and heartfelt. You sense Billie Joe's despair at the divisions, poverty and dysfunction within his country.

There's a real sense of the band playing live on *Saviors* and loving every minute of it. The performances have an intensity and urgency that can only



Mike's enthusiasm for the new material was palpable and it comes across in the recording

really be attained by playing live in the same room and capturing the very best take. 'Bobby Sox' is a fabulously twisted and searing track, which follows a classic loud-quiet-loud grunge template, with Billie Joe sounding positively Kurt Cobain-like, while Mike's isolated bass and Billie Joe's jagged guitar are reminiscent of 'Debaser' by the Pixies.

'Coma City' is a life-affirming "1-2-3-4 meet you at the end" punk rush, as is the mindless thrash of the second track 'Look Ma, No Brains!'. By contrast, 'Suzie Chapstick' is an enigmatic 1960s Byrds-style California jangle with a warm, nostalgic lyrical glow.

Refreshingly, gone is the pristine, precision-timed sound of some earlier albums that is just too crisp and gleaming to have any real teeth. The sound here feels human and edgy. The album works because it has conviction, and there's an unbridled energy and joy running through it.

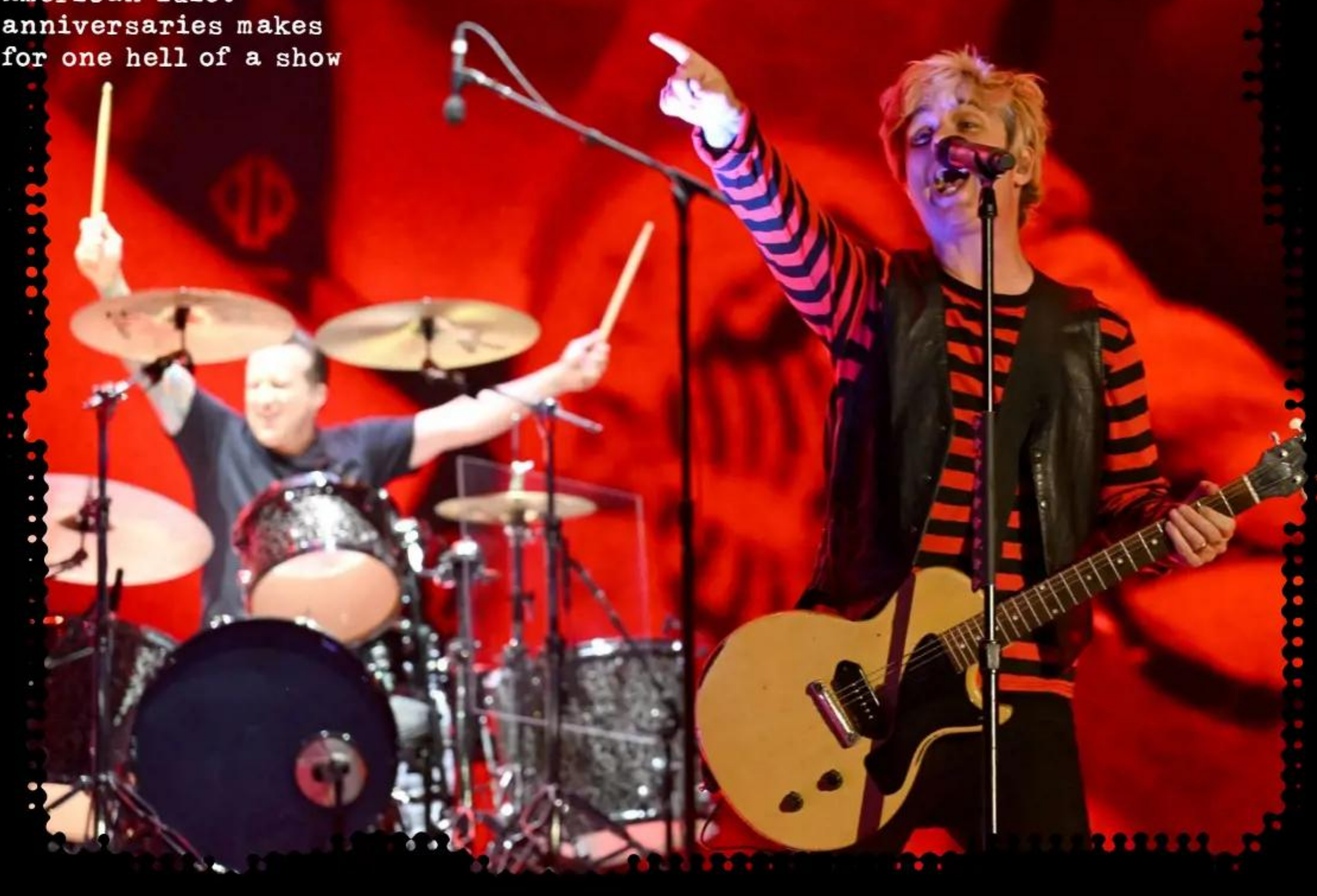
There's a breadth and depth to *Saviors*, the sound of a band that has matured and is content within its own skin. It's also the sound of a band not cautious of dealing head-on with the deep divisions within America today.

Saviors was released on 19 January 2024 and reached number one in the UK and four in the US. Reviews were largely positive, with critics acknowledging a return to form.

A review in *Uncut* concluded that Green Day "unleash 15 compact, primarily pro forma bangers". Stephen Thomas Erlewine of *AllMusic*, meanwhile, welcomed the sound of a band that had moved forward. "Age may dampen Green Day's roar, but it has also heightened their songcraft, and that's reason enough to give *Saviors* time to let its hooks sink in."

While Billie Joe had struggled to define what kind of album to make, it ultimately became an organic process, particularly when aligned with the two anniversaries of *Dookie* and *American Idiot*. "We had a large batch of songs that we recorded in London," Billie Joe told *Vulture* in January 2024, "and when we saw it come together, I remembered thinking, 'Oh, this is the connection'. *Saviors* does feel like a trifecta with *Dookie* and *American Idiot* where it feels like a life's work. I went from not knowing what the hell I was doing to going, "Oh gosh, we managed to bridge the gap between those two huge albums." GD

Saviors coinciding with *Dookie* and *American Idiot* anniversaries makes for one hell of a show



WE HAVE A LOT OF BRITISH INFLUENCE TO OUR MUSIC

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

GREENDAY
BILLIE JOE HAS USED HIS WELL-WORN FERNANDES STRATOCASTER, CALLED 'BLUE', SINCE HE WAS 11 YEARS OLD

924
ZOMBIES

PUNK TO THE RESCUE

Words by Richard Bienstock

Green Day's BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG reveals the origin story behind SAVIORS, the punk superheroes' first new album in four years, and looks back on the making of 1994's DOOKIE

Green

day burst onto the scene – or, at least, the mainstream scene – 30 years ago with *Dookie*, the multi-platinum monster of a record that was largely responsible for dragging punk rock out of cramped clubs and dingy DIY venues and into the world of sold-out arenas, glossy magazine covers and near-constant radio and MTV rotation.

And while the trio – singer and guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong, bassist Mike Dirnt and drummer Tré Cool – remain by far the most commercially successful punk band in history, they've also spent the last three decades taking a torch to any conventional ideas of what punk is. Unless, of course, you ask Billie Joe, who never subscribed to conventionality in the first place. ▶

LEAVE
ME
ALONE

'IF GREEN DAY WERE A NEW BAND IN THIS ERA, I FEEL LIKE WE WOULD FIT RIGHT IN NEXT TO ED SHEERAN AND TAYLOR SWIFT IN A LOT OF WAYS'

BILLIE JOE IS FEELING CONFIDENT

"Punk, to me, has always meant freedom," he tells *Guitar World*. "Maybe there's some people where it's just about being an aggressive punk-rocker and saying, 'fuck society' and falling into all those sorts of clichés. But that's not my definition. For me it's about getting into the deep end of the water as an artist. All that other stuff is just limitations."

From the smash acoustic ballad 'Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)' to the nine-minute, multi-movement epic 'Jesus of Suburbia', to the ambitious, ultimately era-defining concept album *American Idiot* (and its ensuing stage adaptation), Billie Joe and Green Day have continually defied stock perceptions of what is and isn't punk rock. Their 13th album, 2020's somewhat divisive *Father of All Motherfuckers*, largely eschewed their characteristic sound in favour of a more Motown, soul, garage rock and hip-hop-influenced approach (with Billie Joe even trying out his best Prince-style falsetto on the title track). And their new and 14th studio effort, *Saviors*, is yet another pivot, this time toward something that is both a return to form and a further pushing out on punk's perimeters.

In the latter category would be tracks like the celestial, widescreen 'Coma City', the 1980s-style hesher-rocker 'Corvette Summer', the 1950s rock pastiche 'Bobby Sox' and the glammy, chest-beating album closer (and real highlight), 'Fancy Sauce'. What's more, Billie Joe also opted to tweak his lead guitar approach on the record, adding in Angus Young-style double-stop-spiked phrases to 'Living in the '20s', spacey, heavily effected lines to 'Fancy Sauce' and a soaring solo to 'Goodnight Adeline', among other standout six-string moments, all of which contrast with his characteristic octave-style melodic work.

That said, there's still plenty of Green Day's archetypal amped-up, caffeinated power-chord throttle throughout *Saviors*, from the rampaging 'Look Ma, No Brains!' to the hard-charging aggro-rock of 'Living in the '20s,' to the anthemic, *American Idiot*-like culture-skewering opening track and first single, 'The American Dream Is Killing Me'.

Throughout, Billie Joe Armstrong paints a maddening and madcap portrait of a world gone crazy, ranting and railing about TikTok and taxes, commies and cocaine, assholes in space, grandmas on fentanyl and superheroes playing pretend. It is, in his words, a "paradise for locos", where everyone is racist, he's fucking his robot senseless and the Uber, apparently, is always running late.

If it all feels a bit chaotic and ludicrous, well, that's just a reflection of the times. "Whether it's social media or influencers or war or Trumpism or political correctness, it just feels like we're all over the place right now," Billie Joe says. "It's just kind of…" he pauses, then laughs. "It's just really fucked up."

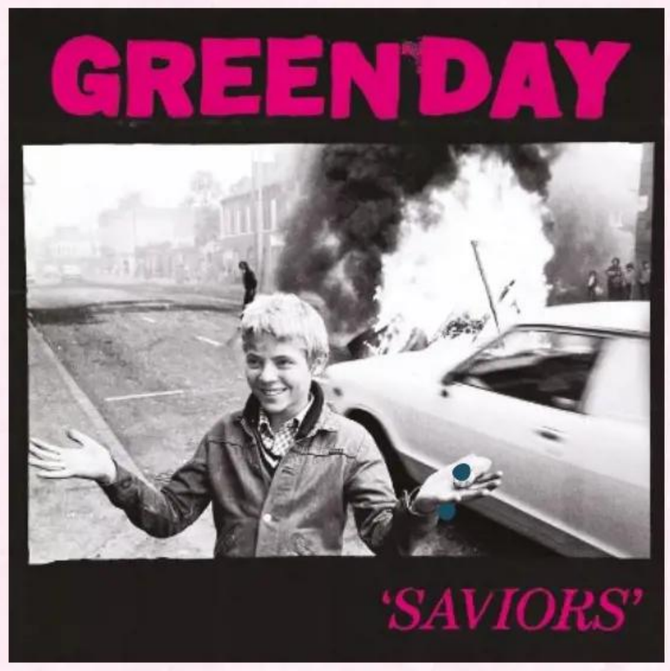
There's an argument to be made that the contemporary music scene can seem similarly hard to make sense of – especially for an act that built its name on three-chord guitar-rock anthems. But here as well, the 51-year-old Billie Joe Armstrong is confident about Green Day's place in the modern world.

"If Green Day were a new band in this era, I feel like we would fit right in next to Ed Sheeran and Taylor Swift in a lot of ways," he says. "Because I just feel that if it's good songs – if it's great songs – you can bust through any genre or any sort of popularity contest. So I just always go to where I'm strongest, and that's good lyrics, good melodies, good songwriting." And, as Billie Joe mentioned previously, ignoring limitations. "You have to throw yourself curveballs sometimes," he says. "Or else you get bored, you know?"

Just days after premiering new songs from *Saviors* at a series of concerts in Las Vegas, Billie Joe sat down with *Guitar World* (where this interview was originally published) to discuss the making of the record, the state of the world – musical and otherwise – in 2023 and, of course, guitars and gear.

He also took time to look back on the making of the landmark *Dookie*, which was recently issued in a massive 30th Anniversary Deluxe Edition set that, along with indelible singles like 'Longview', 'Basket Case' and 'When I Come Around', is packed with unreleased four-track and cassette demos, outtakes and live recordings from across the *Dookie* world tour.

"We were just three dipshits that were along on this crazy ride," Billie Joe says of the record that has now sold more than 20 million copies worldwide. "We made something we were really proud of, and we knew that we made something that we would love and people would love. We just didn't know how many people would love it." ▶



The release of *Saviors* coincided with anniversaries with *Dookie* and *American Idiot*, and the band says the three form a thematic trilogy

'WHEN I WAS A KID, I LOVED EDDIE, ANGUS AND RANDY. THEN SOMETHING HAPPENED WHERE IT WAS LIKE YOU HAD TO BE IN THE GUITAR OLYMPICS'

BJ ON SWITCHING TO PUNK

***Saviors* is Green Day's 14th studio album overall. As the primary songwriter in the band, did you have any particular intention as far as what you wanted to do this time out?**
You know, the intention kept changing. There were times where I just wanted to make a straight-up punk-rock record. And there were times where I wanted to do sort of stadium-rock, Britpop-sounding songs. And then there were a lot of false starts. So with all of it, I was almost kind of confused. But then we went into the studio with the songs we loved the most and everything seemed to come together. It was almost like the lightbulb went off as we were recording it. Like, "Oh, now I know what we're doing!"

Was there any particular song which sparked this new batch of material?
There were a few. One was the song 'Saviors'. And then also 'Look Ma, No Brains!', 'Goodnight Adeline' and 'One Eyed Bastard' were there, too. Then later on, I had an old demo of 'The American Dream Is Killing Me', and that seemed to just sort of bring the whole thing together.

Was there a reason that you chose 'Saviors' to be the title track?
Well, in addition to being one of the first songs I wrote for the album, I also felt like, "Man, this sounds like the first song off an album." Eventually that first song became 'American Dream', but when we were trying to figure out what we wanted to call the album as we were mixing, I was listening to 'Saviors' and really hearing the sort of desperate cry for help that the song has. It's trying to make some sense of the world. So I was like, "We should call the album *Saviors*." Because I think everybody's looking for something or someone to hold onto, and to believe in.

To that point, 'The American Dream Is Killing Me' taps into that feeling of being untethered from modern society, and trying to find your way in a chaotic world. It's something that you also addressed on *American Idiot*. Could you have imagined that you'd still be doing this two decades later?
I actually think our country is more divided than it's ever been. And the thing about the American Dream, the original idea of it, is just sort of lost on me at this point. On top of that, now we're all sort of set on this algorithm that we're being fed every day. I'm a victim of it, too. The stuff that I see on Instagram or YouTube, it just feeds the thing in your brain that your brain wants to see. You think you're being informed, but really you're retreating more into your own bubble.

On the other hand, there's tracks on the new record like 'Corvette Summer', which revel in escapism. You just want your power chords and record stores, and to shut out the outside world.
Totally. You definitely need to have some kind of escape from everything, whether it's going to your favourite record store, hanging out with friends in person or just doing something where you're not sitting in front of a screen the entire time. For me, I still listen to punk rock every day. I'm always looking for cool new bands, or maybe I'll go down the rabbit hole of trying to find power-pop stuff that you can't find anywhere except for on Discogs or specialty record stores. I do still have that escapism that I've had ever since I was 12 years old. So something like 'Corvette Summer' is saying, 'I just wanna feel good for a minute'. Or, you know, two-and-a-half minutes. [Laughs]

On your last record, *Father of All Motherfuckers*, you worked with producer Butch Walker. This time you returned to Rob Cavallo, who helmed *Dookie* and *American Idiot*, among other classic Green Day albums. What does Rob bring to the equation?
Rob is really smart and knowledgeable. And he's really musical – he can play the shit out of the piano, play the shit out of the guitar. He understands how to connect with the band as far as getting a really good take and gluing everybody together. And he just has non-stop energy. There would be times where I would start to get tired and I would shut down, but then you've got Rob, who will give me a second wind. And not by force, but just by creating a good vibe in the studio and having a good time and focusing everything on the positive. And being like, "I want to kick ass!" in a way. He's like a coach: "Let's get out and beat people's ass with this next song!" And then you go, "Fuck, yeah, let's go!"

***Father of All* diverged pretty far off of Green Day's characteristic sound and was a polarising record amongst fans. How do you regard it in hindsight?**
I think you make records sometimes where you have to learn more about yourself. To me, *Father of All* was this record that was like Foxboro Hot Tubs or something like that. Kind of garage-y. I love that stuff. And at the end of the day I'm just trying to come up with good melodies and really take my time with writing lyrics and make sure there's nothing left unsaid. So I plan on making records like that in the future. Everyone's gotta make records that are their 'id records' or something, you know?

On *Saviors*, one thing that feels a bit different is the approach to solos. For starters, there's more of them.
Yeah. I kind of put on my 'rock god' hat and just started soloing a lot. Actually,

I think I soloed more on this record than any we've ever done. And not in a shredder kind of way, but just more like, you know, I love [late Pretenders guitarist] James Honeyman-Scott and [late David Bowie and Ian Hunter guitarist] Mick Ronson and guys like that, who play those really melodic solos that fit with the melody and what the song is calling for. Plus, it's fun to just kind of go off and rip a guitar solo. Like 'Fancy Sauce' – I'm playing that 'ghost-sounding' solo where it kind of comes in and out, and 'Living in the '20s', I wanted to have a guitar solo like 'I Can't Explain' or an old Kinks song, where it just has that kind of haywire feel to it. It's also very Angus [Young]-sounding. You're bending strings and wiggling 'em around. [Laughs]

What were your main guitars on *Saviors*?
I used my '56 Les Paul Junior a lot. A Les Paul 'burst that I've been using for years, that's on a lot of the solos. A '59 Les Paul Standard that I used quite a bit. I also had a '53 Telecaster and a '60 Esquire. You can hear the Tele for sure on the solo on 'Living in the '20s'.

How about amps?
I have this one amp, a *Dookie* amp that I haven't used in a while, since maybe *Nimrod*. That was the main one. It's a Marshall 100-watt Super Lead [1959SLP] that was modified by Martin at CAE [Billie Joe is referring to the late Martin Golub of Custom Audio Electronics and later L.A. Sound Design]. I used that for the bigger, crunchier parts of the songs.

Is this the modded Marshall we've come to know as 'Pete'?
Yeah, it is that one. I put 'Pete' on it because I named it for a friend.

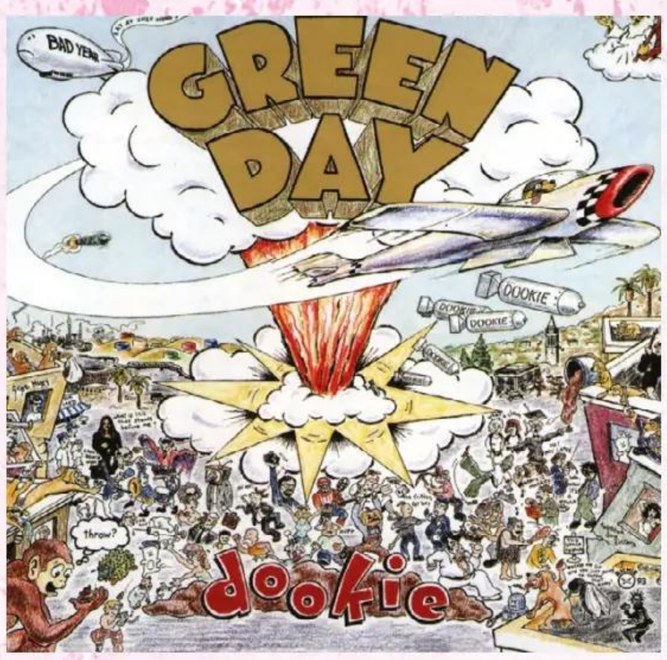
What's Pete up to these days?
Oh, he's hanging around somewhere. I haven't talked to him in a while. [Laughs]

How would you characterise your approach to the guitar these days?
When I was a kid, I loved Eddie Van Halen and Angus Young and Randy Rhoads. And then something happened where it was like you had to be in the guitar Olympics. If you wanted to play, you had to be as good as those guys and be able to play as fast as Yngwie Malmsteen. And I was like, "Man, then I'm just gonna end up sitting in my room for the rest of my life. I'm never gonna be ▶

"Yeah. I kind of put on my 'rock god' hat and just started soloing a lot," says Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong, photographed 16 October 2023, in Orange County, California

in a band, ever!" That's when my tastes started changing and I started getting more into punk music and alternative, where it was more about rhythm playing. And also still about great guitar sounds and great solos, but not like the heavy metal thing, which started to become kind of a parody.

Billie Joe feels *Dookie* has aged perfectly and the songs still feel fresh to play



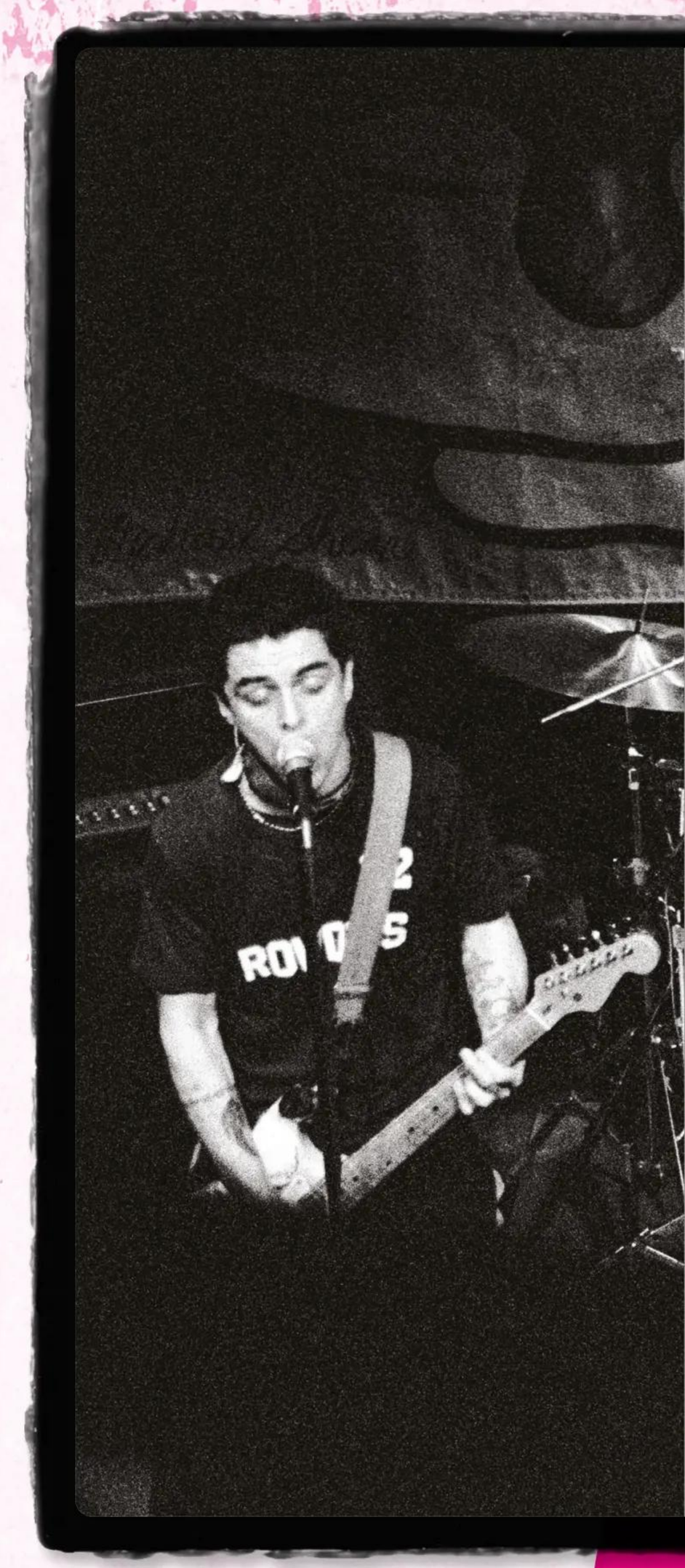
So what happened was I got more into being an anti-solo guitar player, especially for *Dookie*. But I think as time went on after that, I became less bashful about saying, "Okay, this is stuff that I had learned along the way, that dates back to when I was 13 years old. Let's let that free now to try to put a spotlight on a little bit more of what I'm capable of, and not be afraid of making a bad noise." I've gotten to a point where I know my limitations, but at the same time I'm really pushing myself to be a better guitar player.

All that said, does it feel like in 2023 people still want to hear guitar bands in a mainstream context? How does Green Day fit into that landscape?
I mean, if we were a new band in this era, I don't know if trying to sign to a major label and doing all that would be the right place for us. But since we have all this history of having big songs and big records and a lot of mainstream success it's a different story. I also feel that we continue to generate new fans, just because there's something about the energy of Green Day that I think a lot of young people flock to every time we put out a new album. Our fans are all ages – and I'm talking, like, 11-year-olds to 65-year-olds in our audience.

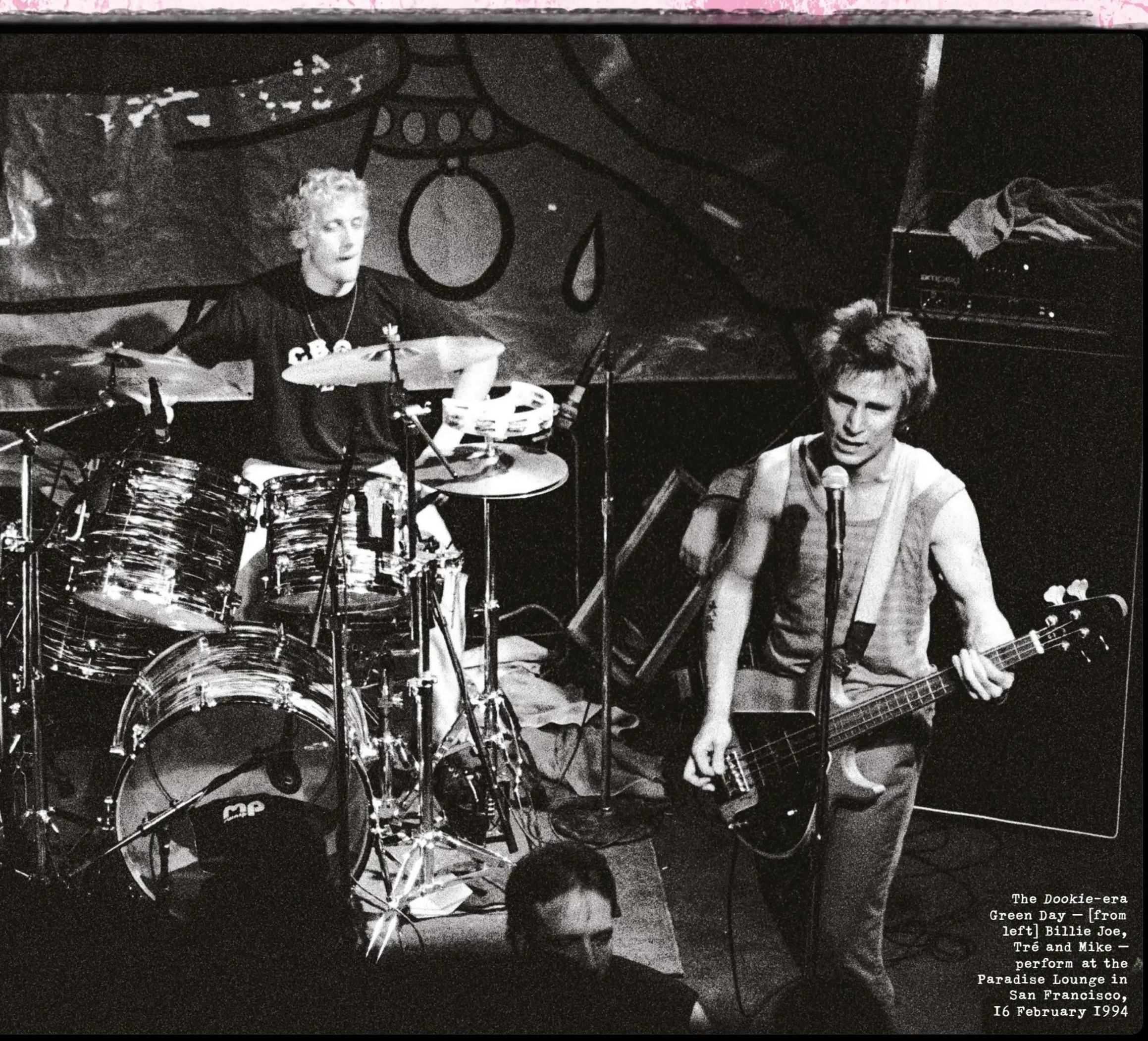
Regarding Green Day's longevity, 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of *Dookie*. In addition to putting together the Deluxe Edition package, you recently played a small club show at the Fremont Country Club in Las Vegas, where you performed the full album from front to back. When you think back to that time, what comes to mind for you?
That record was just massive, and we were all, like, 21 years old. So it was such a crazy era for us. But the great thing about *Dookie* is when we were rehearsing it [for the Vegas show], it still felt fresh. It didn't sound dated. And all our favourite records, whether it's The Beatles' *Revolver* or The Who albums or the first couple of Van Halen records, one of the things that makes them great is you're like, "Oh, this feels like it was just made yesterday." And *Dookie* still feels like that.

One interesting thing in listening to the four-track demos included on the Deluxe Edition, they're close to what we hear on the official studio versions. Is that the way you guys were working back then, with everything really tight and ready to go by the time you hit the record button?
Definitely. Because we didn't want to change our sound. Although we did want to make everything sound bigger, with fatter guitars and a bigger sonic range overall. Because our first couple records, the first one [*39/Smooth*] was made for 700 bucks, and the second one [*Kerplunk*] was made for, like, 2,000 bucks or something like that. And in a small studio. So we wanted to expand on that and have a little bit more time to get better sounds. But also, we were really adamant about the fact that we grew up hearing bands go from their original sound to the big, gated reverb snare that just washes everything and makes records from the 1980s sound like shit. We didn't want to do that. For us it was, "We want to reflect what we sound like live, but just make it larger."

In 1994, an album like *Dookie* would not have been pegged as an obvious hit. That was the era of grunge, when guitar rock was not exactly bright and shiny and unashamedly melodic. Did you feel out-of-step with the mainstream at that time?
I think so. But grunge had also started becoming really watered down. You could hear a lot of people were just being imitators of Nirvana and Pearl Jam. And so we were like, "Well, let's just be anti-that." [Laughs] Maybe not necessarily 'anti', but, "Let's be the other side of the coin." And then there's the other side of that, where if you're going against the mainstream grain, you could fall flat on your face, too. There's definitely that fear. You don't know what's gonna happen. But we knew we made something we were really proud of, so we had that.



And once you achieve success, then you have to contend with being perceived as sellouts. In fact, Green Day had to deal with it even before *Dookie* was released, just due to the fact that you had signed to a major



The *Dookie*-era Green Day — [from left] Billie Joe, Tré and Mike — perform at the Paradise Lounge in San Francisco, 16 February 1994

Images by Jen Rosenstein. Getty, Adobe Stock

label. Looking back, does it seem a little insane how worked up people could get about that sort of thing?

It was weird. It was crazy. I mean, I definitely feel like we were sort of the guinea pig. It's like we were like the first pancake, you know? [Laughs] Other bands that came after us that were punk and got popular, they didn't get the kind of backlash that we did.

But the area we come from, it's the East Bay, it's the home of [incendiary punk zine] *Maximum Rocknroll*. So I think it was a combination of being from the area we came from and also being the first one. But it makes you start to really understand who your real friends are. I remember getting in fist fights with people over this shit, you know? Now, I don't think it would ever happen. I mean, I don't know the scenes today, whatever their rules are, but it was crazy for us. But I know we made the right choice.

You headlined the When We Were Young Festival in Vegas, where you performed alongside bands like Blink-182, Good Charlotte, Sum 41 and dozens of other acts that incorporate elements of that *Dookie* approach into their sound. Do you hear the influence?

Yeah, for sure. I mean, a lot of it is just because bands have told me, to my face "If it wasn't for that record…" [Laughs]

It's like when I listened to Generation X or the Replacements. All those big bands for me – I guess it's what *Dookie* is for a lot of other bands. And I couldn't be more grateful for that. For people to be like, "You put something out there that had an impact on someone else's future?" It's an amazing thing. GD

'JUST FUCKING GO FOR IT!'

ROB CAVALLO GIVES GREEN DAY SOME SAGE ADVICE

Billie Joe Armstrong — with his trusty Gibson Les Paul Junior — in action at Universal Amphitheatre, Universal City, California, late 2004

PUNK ROCK OPERA

BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG recalls the making of Green Day's monumental comeback album, 2004's American Idiot

Words by Richard Bienstock

Green Day began the 1990s as a trio of snot-nosed Bay Area punks, but they ended it as one of the biggest rock bands in the world, with three consecutive multi-platinum albums (led by the mega-smash 1994 effort *Dookie*), a string of hit singles (including the prom dance staple 'Good Riddance [Time of Your Life]') and numerous sold-out tours.

But at the dawn of the new millennium the band was at a crossroads. Their 2000 effort, *Warning*, which saw them move in a more pop and folk-influenced direction, was, at least for Green Day, a commercial disappointment – in part due to an unenthusiastic response from fans, and also the fact that its songs leaked onto Napster weeks before its release. Furthermore, personal relationships between Billie Joe Armstrong, bassist Mike Dirnt and drummer Tré Cool were at a low, with Mike admitting to *Rolling Stone* at the time that "breaking up was an option." Nevertheless, Green Day soldiered on, and by 2002 were 20 songs into a follow-up album, titled *Cigarettes and Valentines*. And then the demo master tapes were stolen.

"We didn't know what we really wanted to do," Billie Joe Armstrong tells *Guitar World*. "We'd been around for, like, a decade and a half, and we were just indecisive." A lesser band might have elected for the breaking-up option. But rather than calling it a day at the ripe old age of 30, Billie Joe and his band mates chose a different path, helped in no small part by some good advice from Green Day's long-time producer, Rob Cavallo. "He said something to me that was really inspiring," Billie Joe says. "He was like, 'Let's make something that's just monumental. Do things that you haven't done before. Just fucking go for it and make an epic statement.' "

That "something" became *American Idiot*, not only the most epic statement of Green Day's career, but also the most epic statement of any rock band in 2004 – let alone a supposed three-chord punk-rock outfit. A quasi-rock-opera celebrating and lamenting the disillusioned and disenfranchised in a post-9/11 America in the throes of the Iraq war, George W. Bush's divisive presidency and all manner of cultural and social dysfunction, the record incorporated big ideas into even bigger musical statements. Billie Joe and his bandmates took inspiration from rock operas and concept albums like The Who's *Quadrophenia* and *Tommy*, David Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* and Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, but also musicals like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Grease*. They blasted out punk anthems like 'Holiday' and the title track, but also extended multi-movement epics like 'Jesus of Suburbia' and 'Homecoming', the latter ▶

"a sort of 'A Quick One, While He's Away' type of suite," Billie Joe says.

Regarding how it all came together, Billie Joe says, "We had access to a recording studio 24 hours a day, and we were just fucking around, doing it for fun. And I remember the response from Rob was, 'This is it.' And then we were like, 'Oh, fuck, it is!' I was getting to make the music I'd always wanted to make and the record I'd always dreamed of."

In essence, that meant pushing everything to the hilt – including his guitar approach. "I wanted to play more guitar solos and let that part of me come out," Billie Joe remembers. "And I was messing with different pedals and working to get the best sounds and to do it with confidence."

Those sounds came courtesy of two primary six-strings – Billie Joe's trusty Gibson Les Paul Junior, and a Les Paul Standard he refers to as "Boobie" – and also two modified amps: a Marshall known as the "Idiot Amp," which was modded with an extra gain stage for a crunchy, excessively thick sound, and a 50-watt Park 75 with a version of Billie Joe's *Dookie* mod in it. A tweed Fender Tremolux was also employed for clean tones, as well as 'smaller' tones like those heard on the intro to 'American Idiot'.

When Green Day emerged from the studio, it was as a band transformed. Whether anyone would appreciate that transformation, however, remained to be seen. "We were known for writing two-minute punk songs, and here we were doing these eight-minute opuses," Billie Joe says. "There was a part of us that was like, 'God, what are people gonna think of this?' Then it just got to a point where we said, 'Fuck 'em. This is where we wanna be,' you know? 'Give us an A or give us an F — there's no in-betweens.' "

Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong, still jumping — 20 years after the release of 2004's *American Idiot* (albeit with a different Gibson Les Paul Junior)

The band got their first taste of how things could go down before the album came out, when they were doing pre-production at the Grand Olympic Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles and decided to invite a crowd to come and watch.

"We talked to KROQ and put out the word, filled the place up and did a little concert," Billie Joe says. "That was the first time that we played 'Jesus of Suburbia'. And I remember there was almost shock in the crowd, where people were like, 'What the fuck did I just hear?' I don't know if that was a good thing or a bad thing, but it felt like a moment where we could say, 'Okay, we're on the right track. This feels good…'"

Things, of course, proved to be really good. Released on 24 September 2004, *American Idiot* not only revived Green Day's career, but went on to become their first number-one album and one of the biggest rock records of the decade. It spawned five hit singles — the title track, 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams', 'Wake Me Up When September Ends', 'Holiday' and an edited-down 'Jesus of Suburbia' — and was nominated for seven Grammy awards, winning for Best Rock Album (*American Idiot*) and Record of the Year ('Boulevard of Broken Dreams'). In 2009, a stage adaptation of the story premiered in Berkeley and eventually made its way to Broadway. To date, *American Idiot* has sold an astonishing 16 million units worldwide – a number that, for most bands, would easily rank it as a personal best-seller, but when you're Green Day, and one of your albums is *Dookie*, that makes it number two on the list.

As for how the experience of *American Idiot* compared to that of its mega-selling older sibling?

"With *Dookie*, we were so young, and the success part threw me for such a loop that I didn't know how to respond to it," Billie Joe says. "Life had changed so quickly that I was always feeling like, 'Did I enjoy that moment enough?' So I think that with *Idiot*, it was, 'Let's get the most we can out of this moment as far as feeling gratitude and feeling like we did something special.' Because we always wanted to have what our heroes had, like The Who making *Tommy* or something along those lines. Every band wants to have a *Sgt. Pepper's* type of moment. And *Idiot* was that moment for us."

It's a moment that Green Day will revisit on their summer's stadium tour in support of the new *Saviors album*, which will also see them celebrate the 30th anniversary of *Dookie* and 20 years of *American Idiot*. Regarding what the band has in store for the shows, Billie Joe says, "Well, we play a lot of songs off *Idiot* anyway, but we're gonna add some more. So in addition to the bigger ones you'll hear songs like 'Letterbomb' and a few others. We've just got to get in and rehearse everything to kind of see what makes sense."

He continues, "But we definitely plan to celebrate those anniversaries for sure, and play more off *Dookie* and *American Idiot*." Billie Joe laughs. "And then at the same time, of course, do plenty of stuff from *Saviors* and, you know, the other records." GD

Images by Chris Polk/Filmmagic, Jen Rosenstein, Getty, Adobe Stock

ROCK OUT TO THE GREATEST SONGS EVER WRITTEN

Journey through more than 50 years of rock history, from early classics to modern anthems. Celebrate the absolute best of rock-and-roll, written by some of the finest journalists working today.

FUTURE

Ordering is easy. Go online at:

magazinesdirect.com

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents

A young Billie Joe Armstrong took a lot of his cues from Joey Ramone

PUNK PARENTS

Words by Neil Crossley

From 1960s melodicism to visceral punk and beyond, Green Day's influences span a broad church…

THE RAMONES

Billie Joe Armstrong, Mike Dirnt and Tré Cool were just four years old when punk blasted its way out of the grassroots venues of New York and London, yet the genre would have a profound impact on them.

The Ramones, in particular, were a strong influence. Their back-to-basics approach was a revelation for young music fans amid the lengthy, bloated prog rock excesses of the mid-1970s, and so it proved for Billie Joe, Mike and Tré two decades later. They were drawn to the short, sharp breakneck songs that made up The Ramones' debut album, and such simplicity would inspire Green Day.

"Joey is the Jesus of punk," Billie Joe once said. "He has this endearing quality where his voice matched the way he looked. He's incredibly handsome, in a praying mantis kind of way. He's just gangly and long-legged, and his voice [sounds like] that – it's like a really insecure kid that's become empowered through rock-and-roll music."

THE CLASH

"We have a lot of British influence in our music," Billie Joe Armstrong told *Vulture* in January 2024. "From the British invasion to glam to the first wave of punk that came out of London. Even Britpop."

Of all the British acts that inspired Green Day, The Clash are arguably the most obvious, for the strength of their songwriting alone. "I want to make sure everything is right, that the song is fully realised," Billie Joe revealed to *Rolling Stone* in 2013. "I think of… the first Clash album – those songs are fully realised, well played. You can almost hear them doing it in a practice room…I want to make sure that while we're evolving, we still sound like a unit."

London Calling, the group's third album released in 1979, also made a significant impact on Green Day in its style, scope and embracing of different genres. The influence of *London Calling* can be felt in the grooves of Green Day's eighth studio album *21st Century Breakdown*.

THE SEX PISTOLS

"*Never Mind the Bollocks* was one of the first punk records I ever heard," Billie Joe told *Rolling Stone* in 2022. "The first thing that popped into my mind when I heard 'Holidays in the Sun' is how those guitars sounded so gigantic and real. Hearing John Lydon's vocals, how he was just sort of this anti-singer [laughs]. For me, it just had a huge impact."

Billie Joe told *Rolling Stone* that the Pistols managed to kill punk rock before it had the opportunity to go mainstream. What they proved, he suggested, is that punk rock was never meant for the masses.

"If you're picking up the guitar to play punk rock music, it's not for fame. You do this because it's something that matters to you, and it's something that's underground, and that was my early experience of being in a punk band with Green Day."

THE WHO

Of all British bands that emerged in the 1960s, The Who have probably had the most noticeable influence on Green Day. Pete Townshend's rock opera *Tommy* helped inspire *American Idiot* in 2004, and not long afterwards, Green Day took to playing The Who's 'Baba O-Riley' in their live sets.

"I loved 'A Quick One, While He's Away' by The Who, and I decided I'd love to write a song that felt like a mini-opera," Billie Joe told *Rolling Stone* magazine in July 2021. "After I wrote 'American Idiot', I was like, 'Who is this character?' Then the ideas started firing at me… It felt like I was in uncharted territory, really for the first time. I'd taken my songwriting to another level."

'Warning', the title track from Green Day's punk-folk sixth studio album, is directly inspired by The Who, among others, as Billie Joe revealed to *Rolling Stone*. "I had been getting into listening to more of The Kinks and The Who, who found a lot of power in an acoustic song and used the guitar almost like a drum. 'Pinball Wizard' is so percussive."

The likes of Pixies and Nirvana also counted the trio as an influence

HÜSKER DÜ

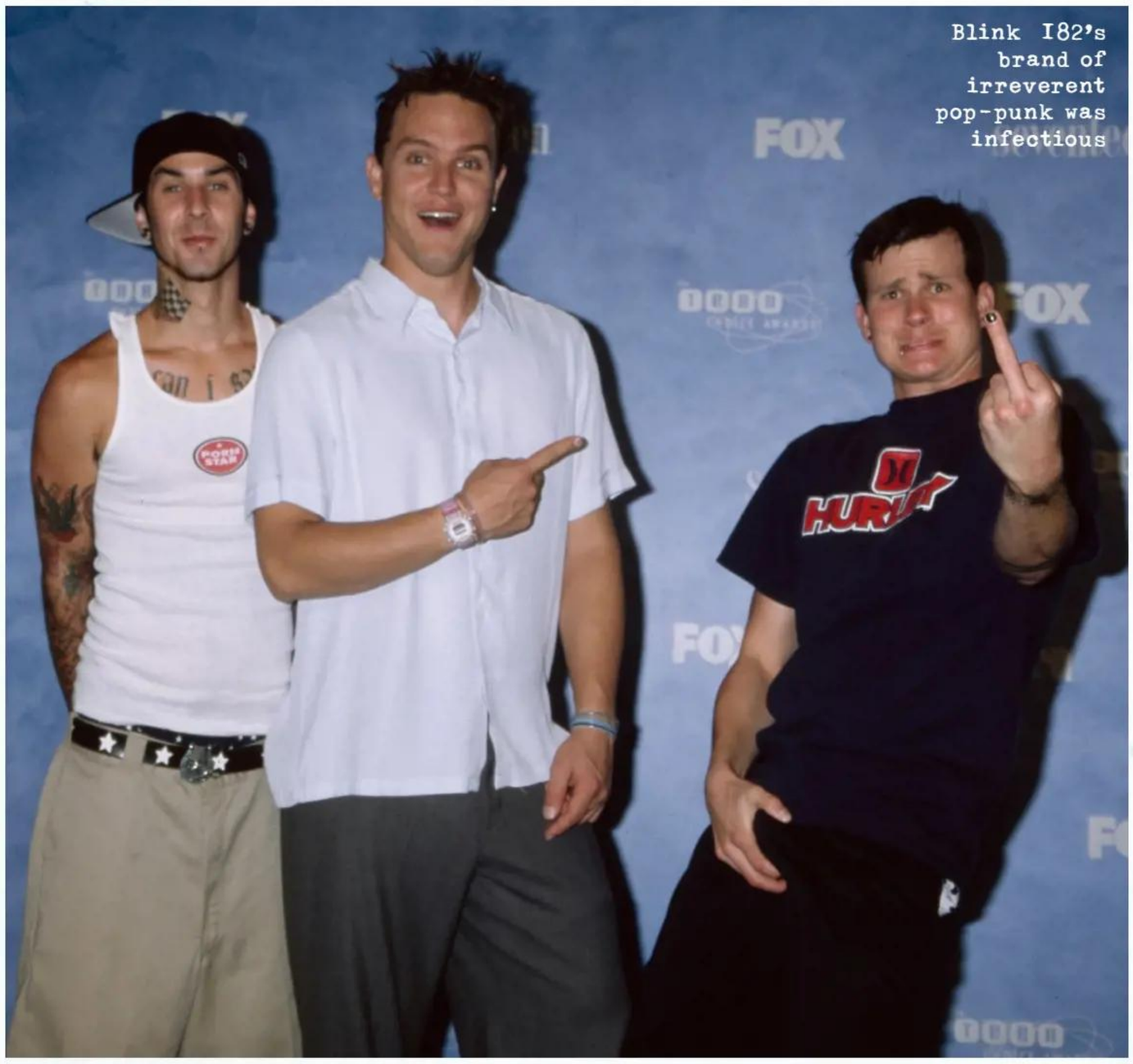
Minneapolis three-piece Hüsker Dü were one of the leading lights of the American independent rock movement in the 1980s, alongside The Replacements, and were renowned for their speed and intensity. Hüsker Dü were strongly influenced by punk and the burgeoning West Coast hardcore scene and for the nascent Green Day, their influence was profound.

"There are no words that describe the huge impact Grant Hart and Bob Mould's music [had] on Green Day," Billie Joe Armstrong told CBS San Francisco, in September 2017, following the sad news that Hüsker Dü drummer Grant Hart had passed away. "We were 16 years old. Hüsker Dü was our favourite band. We became a three-piece because of Hüsker. We went through adolescence listening to this band. I wanted to be a songwriter because of Hüsker Dü. To put it simply, there would be no Green Day if it wasn't for Hüsker Dü."

Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

GREEN DNA

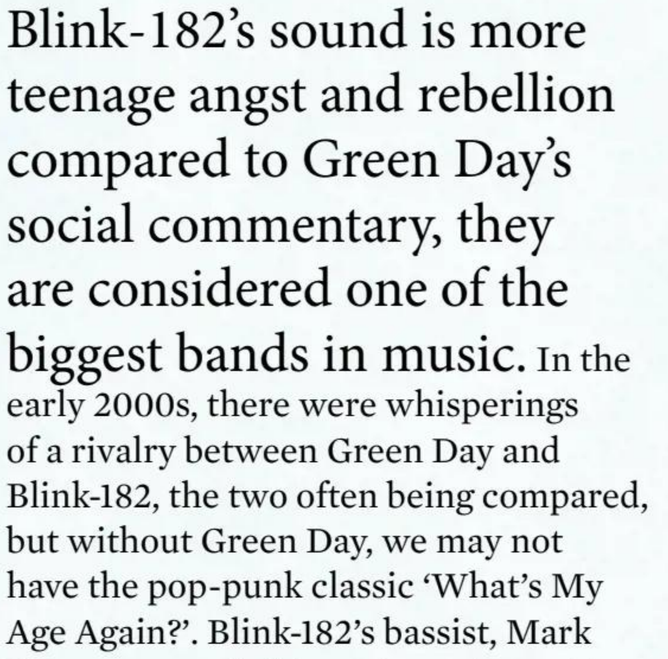
What could be described as 'The Dookie Effect', Green Day's third album inspired much of the music we know and love today


Blink 182's brand of irreverent pop-punk was infectious

BLINK-182

While

Blink-182's sound is more teenage angst and rebellion compared to Green Day's social commentary, they are considered one of the biggest bands in music. In the early 2000s, there were whisperings of a rivalry between Green Day and Blink-182, the two often being compared, but without Green Day, we may not have the pop-punk classic 'What's My Age Again?'. Blink-182's bassist, Mark Hoppus, revealed in an interview with *Kerrang!* that he was attempting to learn the riff to Green Day's 'J.A.R.'. "I kind of messed up the progression, and I played it incorrectly", which became the base for Blink's iconic song. 'J.A.R.' was written by Mike Dirnt, in memory of his childhood friend who died tragically in a car crash, and that strong bass riff must have drawn Mark to the lesser-known track. Blink-182 co-headlined the Pop Disaster Tour with Green Day, which in the same interview, Mark reminisced about being a big deal for his band.


Fall Out Boy got to tour with Green Day on the Hella Mega Tour

FALL OUT BOY

Another band which hold Green Day in high esteem is Fall Out Boy: the Chicago rockers, whose pop-rock-with-an-emo-edge style has fans jumping around to hits such as 'Thnks fr th Mmrs' and 'Sugar, We're Goin Down'. In 2015, Fall Out Boy's Patrick Stump got the opportunity to induct his heroes into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. The awe for Green Day was evident in Patrick's speech when he admitted he used to ditch class to listen to *Dookie* on cassette, calling the album "wise beyond its years". With genuine passion, Patrick stated how "in 1994…this was all mine. I followed every interview, I watched every TV performance". Fall Out Boy bassist Pete Wentz laughed about how fans mistake Fall Out Boy for Green Day, and you can imagine they're pretty happy to be mistaken for their punk rock idols.

Words by Kate Purdy

LADY GAGA

It should come as no surprise that it's definitely not just pop-punk bands that honour Green Day in their musical inspiration history. Lady Gaga is a global superstar, wowing the world over with her astonishing music, experimental fashion and sublime acting. In a candid interview, she recalled the time before she burst into the music industry and highlighted the importance that Green Day's *Dookie* had on her childhood. She confessed in true Gaga style how she "wanted to lick the pages from the booklet! That particular album, I mean, it is iconic." Maybe this could've been the only way she wanted to digest this classic album… Lady Gaga's whole brand aims to be provocative, controversial, and push the boundaries of what audiences have seen before – sounds pretty punk to us.

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

Although Green Day and My Chemical Romance have different sounds, Green Day walked so they could run. MCR frontman Gerard Way revealed how he first picked up a guitar because of Billie Joe Armstrong. A massive break for MCR was opening for Green Day on the US leg of the *American Idiot* tour, allowing the newcomers to witness first-hand their magnetic and energetic performances. Another massive fan of *Dookie*, Gerard speaks of how the anti-establishment message resonated with him, reinforced by songs from

American Idiot. The creative expression that producer Rob Cavallo was given on *Dookie* gave MCR the confidence to take an experimental path with *The Black Parade* – even though the composition of this album is closer to the concept album that was *American Idiot*. Bringing together the best of *Dookie* and *American Idiot*, *The Black Parade* is one of the most unique albums of the 2000s.

SUM 41

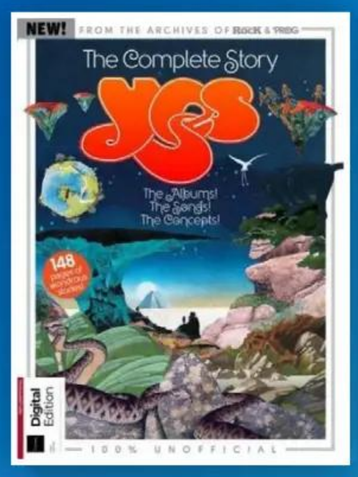
Canadian rockers Sum 41 were another band influenced by *Dookie* in their youth. In the *NME*, frontman Deryck Whibley reflected how, as a teenager, "Seeing the video for 'Basket Case' for the first time… It had so much energy, and it was so different. I'd never seen anything like it before. From then, I was an instant fan." So, in a similar Green Day style, Sum 41 gives us punk aggression within their catchy anthems – particularly in their debut 2001 album *All Killer No Filler*. Sum 41's famous anthem 'Fat Lip' wears its Green Day influences on its sleeve. The inspiration for the song puts the track within the pop-punk genre infused with 2000s skater cool while incorporating influences from hip-hop groups such as Run-DMC and Beastie Boys. Deryck has spoken about how the band weren't expecting 'Fat Lip' to be a big hit. "There weren't a ton of bands making that kind of music" and how "it's always been about the music to us." GD

'I WANTED TO LICK THE PAGES FROM THE BOOKLET'

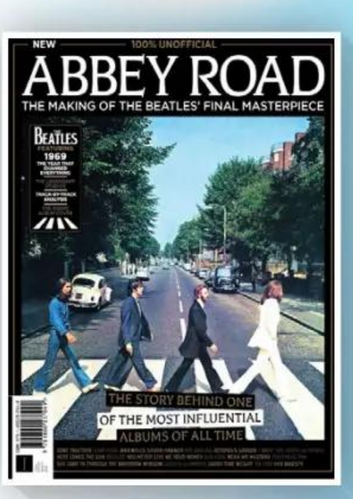
LADY GAGA *REALLY* LIKED DOOKIE

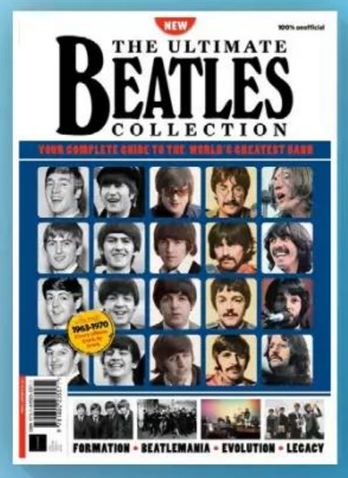
Images by Adobe Stock, Getty Images

Celebrate the songs and sounds of the greatest decades in music

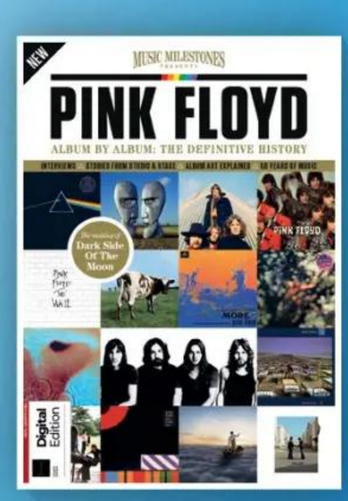


Explore the lives and legacies of some of the world's most iconic artists





Crank up the volume and get to know the best rock and metal bands on the planet



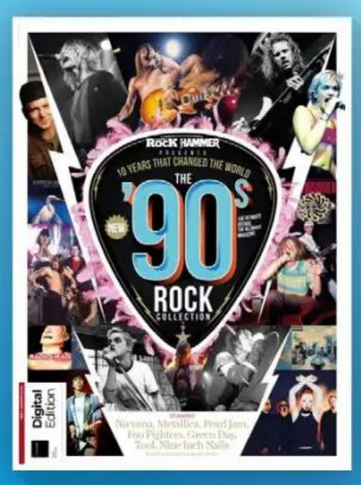
Get great savings when you buy direct from us

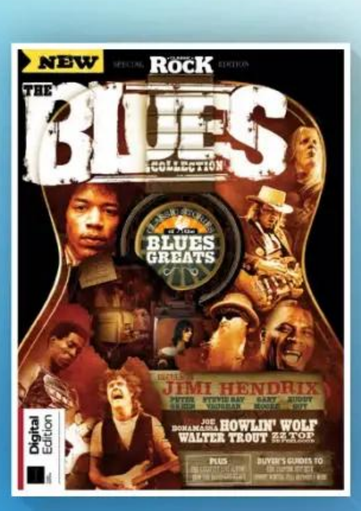
1000s of great titles, many not available anywhere else

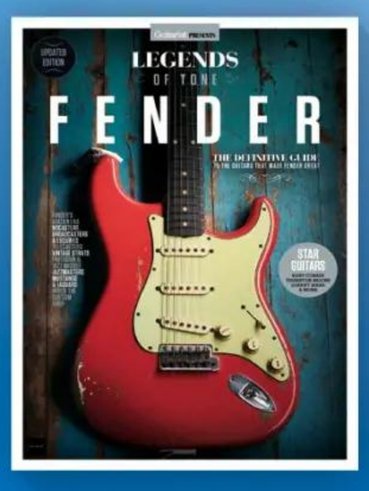
World-wide delivery and super-safe ordering

ROCK ON WITH OUR MUSIC BOOKAZINES

Discover the origins of legendary songs, relive iconic performances and meet the pioneers behind some of music's greatest names







Discover everything there is to know about your favourite pop stars

Follow us on Instagram @futurebookazines

FUTURE

www.magazinesdirect.com

Magazines, back issues & bookazines.

THE STORY OF

GREEN DAY

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

The Story Of Green Day Editorial
Editor **Drew Sleep**
Senior Designer **Phil Martin**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**
Managing Director **Grainne McKenna**

Contributors
Shane Baldwin, Richard Bienstock, Neil Crossley, Aiden Dalby, Darren James, James Jan, Lawrence Livermore, Kate Purdy, Scott Rowley, Henry Yates, Ian Winwood

Cover images
Getty Images

Photography
All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely, Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman**

Printed in the UK

Distributed by Marketforce – www.marketforce.co.uk
For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

The Story of Green Day First Edition (MUB6309)

© 2024 Future Publishing Limited

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this bookazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards.

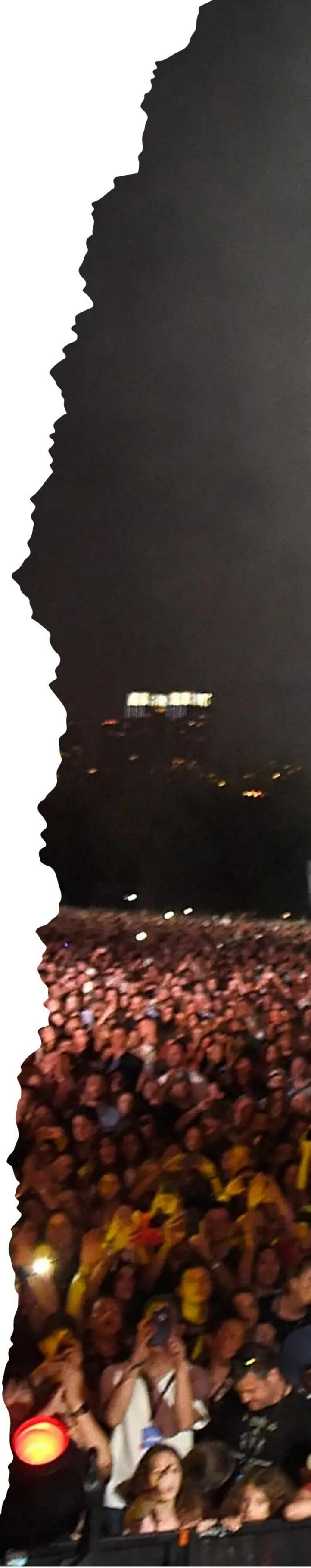
All contents © 2024 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial and Strategy Officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

Widely Recycled

ipso. For press freedom with responsibility